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# FANTASTIC UNIVERSE®

HENRY SCHARF

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# THE NIGHT BEFORE THE BATTLE

by J. T. McINTOSH

THE NIGHT before the battle...

It wasn't a new situation. It had happened a million times before. Sometimes there had been camp-fires and bivouacs; sometimes trenches swept by machine-gun fire; sometimes the father and mother of all air raids all through the night to soften up the sleepless troops for the onslaught at dawn.

This time it was two space navies that were all set to batter each other to death—the Terran Navy and the Colonist Fleet. The Terran Navy was far from Earth. The Colonists were fighting desperately on their own doorstep.

And this, as everybody knew, was the deciding battle. The last battle.

Yet in a way it was neither the deciding battle nor the last battle, because the outcome was not in doubt. It would go like all the other battles that the Terran Navy had won, right from the Solar System itself where the Colonies first rashly attacked the far outposts, right back to Lavendis

itself. The Colonists had no secret weapon. The Colonists were going to be crushed—and serve them right. Who started it, anyway?

So it wasn't the deciding battle—not when the issue was already decided.

And the Colonists had a desperate plan, a crazy, suicidal plan, that ensured it wouldn't be quite the last battle. There was a way to fight on, to have something to fight with, even after this latest and greatest defeat. For the Colonists knew as well as everybody else that it was going to be defeat.

On Earth all that was known was that a major naval engagement was due about now, might already have taken place. Man had long outdistanced tortoise-slow radio waves in his rat race through the galaxy.

Naturally there was worry on Earth, but not about the outcome. People there were anxious, as always in war, about sons, husbands, fathers, boy-friends, brothers. Even a great

victory meant empty places, sorrow, grief. Sometimes it seemed that utter defeat would be preferable to more glorious, expensive, bloody victory...but only to the women, of course.

On the *Chesapeake*, the Terran flagship, there was some surprisingly academic discussion.

"I make it an even chance," said one of the navigators, "that we'll be dead tomorrow night or alive in fifty years."

"Call yourself a mathematician?" another navigator sneered. "What about auto accidents?"

"Swallowed up in the variables," said the first navigator calmly. "I guess Buster will go all out for complete annihilation of the Colonists. That'll mean that only about half of the whole force will be left. But since Buster's in this scrapheap himself, we should have a slightly better than even chance of being around afterwards. Enough to take care of the factor of auto accidents when we get back."

"I don't see," said a junior officer, "why we don't just swoop in and blow the Lavendis Capitol to blazes, with Bloody Mary and all."

"You'll learn, boy, you'll learn," sighed an engineer captain. "Any weapon a ship mounts she has to carry, right? Any power it uses she has to carry too, right? What chance has a ship got against a land-based Mark XI Cunliffe drawing power from half a planet? No, it's got to be ships against ships first. Knock out the naval cover, then—"

"Maybe we won't have to fight," said the doctor hopefully. "Don't forget Five by Five."

A chorus of derisive noises showed what the company thought of Five by Five.

"Knock out the naval cover," said the engineer captain patiently, "and then—"

"For Chrissake," said a voice of

wrath, "how can we play poker in the middle of a debating society? By instinct?"

"What else did you ever use?" somebody asked.

In the throbbing heat of the sultry night of City One, on Lavendis, Ann Horley came downstairs in a sweater and shorts. "I guess I'd better go," she said, trying to smile.

Her father pulled his glasses down so that he could see her properly. "You're not going like that?"

She grimaced. "Why should I put on my smartest clothes to die in?"

"Don't be bitter about it, Ann," said Horley gently. "It has to be this way."

"Like hell it has!" Bill shouted, jumping up. "I say it's crazy. It's more than flesh and blood can stand."

Horley was calm—weary, his eyes pools of horror, but calm. "It's a simple problem, Bill. One of you has to die in the next few hours. If it's you, only Ann is left to carry on the fight. But if you're left instead—"

"Then we can fight one more battle, with any sardine-cans and old oil-tanks we can rustle up and use as fighting ships," said Bill bitterly.

"Bill, don't make it any more difficult than it is already," Ann begged. "The First Citizen's right. The women are in this as much as the men. But I don't want to talk about it. I'd better just go."

The three of them had nothing in common to suggest they were father, son and daughter. Senator Horley, who rated about Number Three in the Colonies, was tall, lean and cadaverous, with burning eyes that showed that when he felt a thing he felt it deeply, sincerely and obstinately. Bill, who was twenty-three, a navigator in the Colonist Fleet when he wasn't simply a farmer, was stocky, good-looking, an ordinary young man who didn't feel anything very deeply except the necessity for a lot of fun in life and the acquaintance of

a large number of healthy young women without too many inhibitions. Ann was small, very serious and wistful for a girl of her physical attractions, an idealist and a lover of Truth.

"We won't see you again," Horley said as flatly as he could.

"I tell you it's crazy!" Bill shouted. "How can I let Ann go and stay behind myself? It's against human nature!"

"I voted for the plan," said Horley quietly. "Better go, Ann. It won't help if we all break down."

"Break down!" Bill sneered. "You'll never break down. You voted for Ann to die. You—"

"Bill, don't talk to Dad like that," Ann said sharply, for her. She sighed. "Yes, I'll stop talking about going and do it. Goodbye."

Without another glance at either of them she went out.

"Dad, isn't there another way?" Bill said urgently.

Horley shook his head.

"Suppose we surrender?"

"Don't let me ever hear you say that word again. We've got to be free, Bill. Dying free is better than living as Earth's slaves."

"I don't know about that," said Bill mutinously. "Me, I'd rather be alive and a slave than dead and forgotten. I'd rather Ann was alive, even as some Terran captain's mistress, than—"

"You don't understand."

"No, I don't," said Bill bluntly. "We fought, sure. Now we're beaten. The sensible thing is to take the best terms we can get. Earth didn't want to fight. We did. Suppose we surrender? They won't murder us all. They won't put us in prison. In five years—"

"It wouldn't be any good," said Horley wearily. "It would all have to happen again. Son, Colonies always fight the mother country sooner or

later. New settlements, new worlds have got to have independence or die. If we surrender, we die. If we lose, we die. There's no future for you or me or Ann or Lavendis or the Colonies unless sooner or later we beat the Terran Navy."

"We never will. You know that."

"I know it. But if we give in now it comes to the same thing."

Bill shook his head hopelessly. "You're a fanatic," he said.

"Yes," sighed Horley. "I guess I am."

One man had every intention of averting the battle.

His name was Canterbury, and he wasn't a bishop, he was a diplomat. Being a diplomat, he naturally wanted to stop the battle if he could. Diplomacy is robbery without violence. If you can get what you want without fighting for it, why fight? If you can't get it, why fight anyway?

He landed by helicopter on Lavendis, about six miles from City One, with Captain Russell of the Terran Navy. There was no flag of truce, no all-out attack to clear a bridgehead. They just landed quietly, casually, discreetly, by night.

As he landed, Canterbury was thinking, too, that it was inevitable that colonies should always fight the mother country, only his reasons were slightly different. Within a few years the aims, temperament and constitution of the colonists were always so different from those of the parent country that no real dispute was necessary. The two groups fought simply because they were different.

The fact that he and Russell were able to land just six miles from City One and walk openly to enemy HQ, in uniform, illustrated his point. Discipline in a colony was never worth a damn. Pioneers went out to new settlements because they hated disci-



pline, because they thought they were as good as any man and wouldn't take orders from anybody, by God.

"I don't think much of their discipline, sir, do you?" Russell said.

Russell was a nice boy, polite, friendly, not particularly bright. He addressed Canterbury as 'sir' not because he had to—the diplomat had only a courtesy rank in the navy which neither of them remembered, offhand—but because Canterbury was twenty-five years older than Russell.

Canterbury grunted, most of his attention occupied in hoping they'd be captured soon and wouldn't have to walk all the way into City One. It was all very well for the captain to skip along like a six-year-old. Canterbury, who was well aware he was known on the *Chesapeake* as Five by Five, weighed 247 pounds on Earth and 281 on Lavendis. To say he was no athlete was an understatement.

Though it was night, the clear, cloudless night of South Lavendis, it was boiling hot as usual and their uniforms weren't any more comfortable in the heat than uniforms ever are. In the dark they saw a couple of kids wearing nothing at all and envied them. The children stared at the uniforms, stuck their thumbs in their mouths and looked puzzled.

Canterbury was cheered at the sight of them. Two kids as young as that wouldn't be allowed to roam far from home.

"What are they doing running about like that at night?" Russell wondered. "Don't these Lavenders look after their kids?"

"Day's too hot for them," Canterbury grunted. "They sleep in the morning and early afternoon." This was not by any means Five by Five's first visit to Lavendis.

To his relief he saw they were entering the outskirts of City One. And within a few minutes they were

stopped by a nondescript group of characters whom they took to be militia.

"Is this some kind of a joke?" their leader inquired. "What's the fancy dress for?"

"Don't you recognize the uniform of the Terran Navy?" Russell asked incredulously.

Evidently they hadn't, or hadn't believed it if they had. Jaws dropped, and one or two hands dropped towards guns that weren't there. The leader had a gun, however, and lost no time in bringing it up.

"This is a diplomatic mission," Canterbury said. "My name's Canterbury. I want to see Senator Horley. Please take me to him."

It took some time to get things sorted out. The night before the bloodiest naval battle in history, the battle which was to decide the future of the galaxy, the Colonists didn't expect to find a diplomatic mission wandering around openly five miles from their HQ.

They didn't know whether to be friendly or scowl at them. Typically, they blamed somebody else for the fact that they'd been able to land and go about unchallenged.

Russell, who was a nice fellow, settled the matter by pointing out that the magazine of the leader's gun was the wrong size and asked him please not to fire it or they'd all be blown to bits. As this was clearly a friendly warning, the militia didn't spit on the Terrans and call them dirty names. They put them in a car, to Canterbury's satisfaction, and took them to see Senator Horley.

Russell was left outside and Canterbury saw Horley alone. That suited him excellently. Russell was only along to show that Canterbury's mission was at least semi-official—that his visit wasn't some kind of hoax.

Canterbury knew Horley. Although he was a militant individualist, he

was more reasonable than most Colonist leaders, which was why Canterbury had elected to approach him and not Jenson or Bloody Mary.

"You must be mad," Horley said wonderingly. "Diplomatic mission, you say? You're not fool enough to think you're going to get away alive?"

Canterbury deposited his 281 pounds in a deep armchair. "Let me put a case, Horley," he said. "As you see, we have landed easily despite your so-called defenses. Do you think it would be any more difficult for a small group to land and execute Bloody Mary?"

Horley went white and choked incoherently. The words wouldn't come, partly because he couldn't make up his mind what he was most angry about. Eventually he picked one of the lesser things.

"You mustn't refer to the First Citizen like that," he said breathlessly.

"Very well," said Canterbury. "I'll put it plainly and politely. Hold us and we execute the First Citizen. And don't say we can't do it. You know we can."

Horley saw the point. Unless the two men were given safe conduct, Earth would see that Bloody Mary was assassinated in reprisal. Earth kept her word. The two-man mission was safe.

"Now that we've established that," Canterbury said, "perhaps we can get on. I'm here to accept your surrender."

Horley laughed bitterly. "There's going to be no surrender," he said. "You think we can fight only one last battle. You're wrong. After tomorrow we'll fight on."

Canterbury noted with satisfaction that he fully accepted the fact that the Colonists would be decisively defeated the next day. It's always best when you can reach agreement on fundamentals.

"How can you fight on?" Canterbury asked mildly.

"You don't expect me to tell you?"

"I don't need you to tell me. I know about your plan of crewing your ships with women, keeping your remaining naval personnel in reserve."

Horley drew a shocked, incredulous breath.

"The question is," Canterbury said, "are you going to be mad enough to do it? Bloody Mary's idea, of course. But—"

"You must not call her Bloody Mary!" Horley shouted.

"Sorry. Her Excellency. Are you really going to do it, Horley?"

"Come with me," Horley said. "I'll show you."

Canterbury hadn't expected this. If he allowed Horley to take him around and show him things, the initiative might pass from his hands into Horley's. "I'll take your word for it," he said.

But Horley was determined. Reluctantly Five by Five hoisted himself out of the armchair again. He hoped there wasn't going to be much walking about.

There was nothing whatever to be seen, though a wild, rich pattern of sound made it clear there were hundreds of people around engaged on a thousand jobs.

"Darkness shield," Horley commented.

Someone clicked a switch. Captain Russell gasped. Canterbury confined himself to raising his eyebrows.

A vast, circular plain that must have been thirty miles across was alive with light and industry. The scene might have come straight from an early science-fiction movie. There were hundreds of ships, and all over the plain they saw scores of cars, tractors and trucks tracing patterns in the dusty base of the valley.

There were far more women than men about. Women of all ages from

eighteen to eighty. Middle-aged women in dark overalls. Teenage girls in shorts. Old women in old fashioned frocks. Young matrons in slacks.

The few men seemed all to be directing or instructing. Only twenty yards from Canterbury, Russell, Horley and the three guards, two male gunners were drilling fifty girls in the use of a Mark VII Cunliffe from one of the ships. All these girls were young—it seemed that the rapid reflexes of the younger women were to be used in attack.

"They won't be ace gunners by tomorrow," Horley said. "But they'll destroy their own number in Terran Navy ships. You'll only have a quarter of your fleet left."

"And you'll have none," said Russell. He went on incredulously: "You people are crazy. Plumb crazy. After the battle, you'll have nothing. Nothing even to make peace for. Certainly nothing to fight with. Nothing—"

"Look, captain," said Horley.

They followed his pointing finger and saw a ship surrounded by piles of equipment which wasn't being put in, as might have been expected, but taken out. The ship itself was nothing but a shell.

"Suicide ships," said Horley. "Sure, they haven't a chance. They haven't even got fuel to get back and land. But each of them will account for a Terran Navy ship. A fully manned ship, five hundred officers and men, destroyed by a shell worked by seventy women. It's a good bargain."

"It's a crazy bargain," began the captain. But then he caught Canterbury's eye, remembered he had instructions to do as little talking as possible, and shut his mouth.

The gun-drill broke up. As the fifty girls turned away, another fifty took their places.

Horley beckoned, and a pretty brunette came over. She brightened at sight of him, but started violently

when she saw the two Terran Navy uniforms.

"This is a diplomatic mission, Ann," said Horley, as she joined them. "Come to accept our surrender."

The girl looked at Canterbury. "You seem kind," she said, naively surprised. "I thought—"

"You thought all Terrans were some kind of wolves?" He shook his head.

"I'm some kind of wolf," Russell murmured, "and you're exactly the kind of prey I've been looking for."

She looked at him, startled. He saw she was even younger than he had thought. A more unsophisticated approach was needed.

He held out his hand. "I'm Captain Russell," he said in his friendliest manner. "Steve Russell."

"And I'm Ann Horley—"

"Horley?"

Canterbury looked at the Senator. He nodded.

Russell burst out: "You mean you're sentencing your own daughter to death? Well, of all the—"

"Captain," said Canterbury warningly, and Russell subsided. He was still holding Ann's hand. Perhaps he had forgotten.

"You see," said Horley significantly, "we're determined."

"Oh yes," said Canterbury, "I know that." He turned to Ann and Russell guiltily let her hand go. "Don't worry, Ann. You may not have to go through with it."

Ann looked quickly, hopefully at Horley, but he shook his head wearily. "The situation isn't any different."

"Do you think you're justified in demanding such a sacrifice?" Canterbury asked mildly. "What do girls like Ann know about Earth, and the issues involved?"

"One day I want to see Earth," said Ann.

"Maybe that could be arranged."

said the captain daringly.

Canterbury nodded, prepared to go along with this. "Maybe it could."

Now it was Horley who was at a loss. "What are you talking about?" he demanded. "What are you trying to do? Sabotage our morale?"

"I have a daughter Ann's age," said Canterbury.

"So have I," retorted Horley.

"You mean you had. Ann's as good as dead. Tomorrow about this time I'll have a daughter and you won't."

"But my son will be left," Horley exclaimed fiercely. "To fight. To die, if necessary."

Ann turned away. "I must go," she said. Russell looked after her small, trim figure with more than casual interest.

"You patriots," Canterbury sighed.

"Whatever happens," said Horley grimly, "there'll be nothing for you. Either we'll win in the end or we'll make you kill us all."

They were on their way back to City One. Horley, Canterbury and one guard were in one car, Russell and the other two in another.

Canterbury wasn't displeased at the way things were building up. He knew that there was a tremendous emotional wave of determination in the Colonies to have no truck with anything but victory or utter defeat. He had approached Horley knowing Horley strongly held this point of view. Unless Horley could be swayed, Canterbury's mission was a failure.

"Horley," said Canterbury, "what do the Colonies want?"

"Independence."

"What does that mean?"

"Freedom."

"In a minute," said Canterbury thoughtfully, "I'm going to lose my temper with you. And that's something that hardly ever happens. Will you kindly tell me in what respect the Colonies, before they stabbed us in the back, were dependent? What

prevented them being free?"

Horley stared at him. "All policy was controlled from Earth."

"True. Doesn't it seem a good idea that policy should be controlled from somewhere?"

"You're playing with words," said Horley. "The Colonies were controlled *by* Earth, *for* Earth. Like America before she broke off from England. Ruled without being consulted, without representation. Everything we suggested was turned down—"

"As far as I remember," Canterbury observed, "the only major suggestion the Colonies made about Colonial affairs which was turned down concerned the settlement of Alpha Seven. And you know what happened there."

Horley was silent for a moment.

The Colonies had insisted on settling Alpha Seven. Earth had said no, the planet was a poor risk. The Colonies had gone ahead anyway, without support from Earth.

What followed was one of those typical disasters for which each side blames the other. When the settlement failed, Earth said "I told you so." The Colonies said Earth had done everything possible to make the scheme fail. Much bitterness was generated, with each side honestly convinced the entire responsibility for the million lives lost rested solely with the other.

Canterbury made use of the silence to think. Not for an instant must Horley be allowed to suspect that his mission was to make peace on any terms. They must argue, haggle. With the air of making enormous concessions, he would offer terms the Colonies couldn't possibly accept, and then give way point by point, magnanimously.

This was the night before a battle which must not be allowed to take place.

Canterbury was glad now he had

seen the battle fleet's preparations. Horley had shown him the scene on the plain to convince him of the Colonies' inplacable determination to fight right to the end. But Canterbury intended to use it to gain better armistice terms than he could have hoped for.

Horley still hadn't spoken when the car stopped. Canterbury frowned. They were in a square, and a small crowd was gathered.

"This isn't your house," he said.

"No," said Horley. "You've got something to say. You'd better say it to the First Citizen."

Canterbury swore under his breath. He had hoped to reach agreement with Horley before going any higher. He had been able to talk fairly calmly with Horley. Negotiations with Bloody Mary wouldn't go nearly as easily.

When they got out of the car Horley was recognized—then, with a shout of incredulity, the Terran Navy uniform. "Shoot the bastard!" somebody yelled and the guard had to be pretty quick in ushering them into the Capitol before the crowd rushed.

There was no sign of the other car. Russell wasn't to be honored, apparently, with a sight of the First Citizen.

Though it was now late evening, Bloody Mary was still so busy she couldn't see them at once.

The situation was typical of the Colonies, Canterbury told himself resignedly. No discipline. No prerogative. No class distinctions. Everybody as good as everybody else.

Organized chaos.

In the Colonies, everybody was free. Everybody had his rights. Bloody Mary might be First Citizen, but she had to hold herself ready to discuss anything with anybody. Otherwise, how would anybody know how free he was?

So the ambassador trying to give the Colonies a chance of survival had to wait outside.

Two lines from a W.S. Gilbert lyric began to jingle in Canterbury's brain:

*When every one is somebody,  
Then no one's anybody!*

There was one consolation. Whoever was holding them up probably wasn't enjoying his interview with the First Citizen.

Bloody Mary had been Mary O'Reilly when she came out from Earth twenty-five years before. She'd been dazzlingly beautiful then.

In the Colonies nobody had minded her promiscuity, her blazing temper, her impetuosity. She had fought her way to the top and stayed there.

Like many people who leave their own country, or their own world, for another, she was more passionately Colonist in her sympathies than any native-born Colonist. It was pretty certain that she'd been responsible for the Colonies' original attack without warning, and just as certain that she was behind the desperate plan of saving the remnants of the Colonist Navy by sacrificing all the women who could fight.

At last Canterbury and Horley were shown into the Presence.

She was still handsome, though her ultra-revealing gown should have been left to someone younger. Her hair was as red as ever, and her voice musical as well as powerful as she roared: "Well, Canterbury, what the hell do you want?"

"Sanity," he said quietly.

She looked past him at Horley. "What does he want?" she demanded impatiently.

"I don't know. I brought him to you so that—"

"I can see you brought him to me. Why didn't you have him shot?"

"There were certain threats that—"

She cut him off with a gesture and

turned back to Canterbury. "Spit it out," she said.

The circumstances were not propitious. Being a very experienced diplomat, Canterbury was well aware that the answer one gets generally depends on the circumstances of the asking.

He temporized, hoping for something to happen, anything. "I'm not dangerous," he said. "Need we have these guards?"

Bloody Mary stabbed the air with her forefinger, and the guards went out.

And something happened, though it was anything but what Canterbury wanted.

A bullet buried itself in the wall beside his ear.

Bloody Mary swung round, bellowing like a bull. The shot had come from the window, and it had obviously been meant for Canterbury.

Her attitude, as usual, was unequivocal. She didn't mind Canterbury being shot—indeed, she was perfectly willing to do it herself. But to have some member of the mob outside who had seen the hated uniform take matters into his own hands, prowl in the grounds of the Capitol and shoot an ambassador in the very presence of the First Citizen herself, was utterly intolerable.

She threw herself in front of Canterbury. Another shot, deflected at the last moment, whipped away a strand of her red hair. She bellowed again.

Then the guards, who had hardly had time to close the door behind them, were running across the room. Two of them climbed through the window after the would-be assassin.

"It wouldn't do any good shooting you now," Bloody Mary said dispassionately, turning her large, naked back on the window and ignoring the shouts in the gardens outside. "Guess we'd better wait now till they catch him before we get back to business."

They caught him all right, a man Canterbury had never seen before. He cringed as Bloody Mary ranted at him, saying that any shooting that was going to be done, she'd do herself.

Canterbury felt rather light-headed. He wasn't used to being shot at.

"He's just a crazy fool," said Bloody Mary at last. "We'll keep him locked up until you go, or until we shoot you ourselves. Take him away. Now let's get back to business. Why did you come?"

With a flash of insight Canterbury realized the attempt on his life had been a blessing. Bloody Mary had saved his life. When you save a man's life, you generally have a friendly feeling towards him. Her truculence wasn't by any means gone, but she seemed quite amiable by comparison. Horley, too, was friendlier. It was obviously a good thing for an ambassador to get himself shot at if he could arrange it.

"It's a long time since I've tasted Lavendis sherry," he hinted.

That, too, was a good move. Bloody Mary roared with laughter and yelled for sherry. They sat down and drank.

"It must be surrender," said Canterbury. "I'm sorry about that, but nothing else can avert the battle. However, I can guarantee generous terms."

"Terms!" Bloody Mary shouted, her vast bosom swelling terrifyingly.

"This is excellent sherry," said Canterbury enthusiastically. He laid down his glass. "Let me do a little crystal-gazing. If this battle takes place, the Terran Navy will be left with about three hundred ships. You will have—well, only you know what your reserves are. And *whether we resume the campaign or not*, the Colonies must die."

"Whether you resume...?" said Horley incredulously.

"Is there any question of it?" Bloody Mary demanded.

Canterbury shrugged. "I must remind you yet again—you attacked us. With your women gone, the Colonies must die. We should probably let you die. And later, recolonize more wisely."

"Die?" exploded Bloody Mary. "Why should we die? We have the children. Thousands of children."

"Yes," said Canterbury politely. "Horley, you're something of a mathematician. You know how many immigrants there used to be from Earth—stopped since the war, of course. You know how many war casualties there have been, and how many more there will be tomorrow. Assume the Terran Navy destroys your fleet and then goes home. Will the Colonies survive?"

There was a long pause.

"This is one of your red herrings, Canterbury," said Bloody Mary. "There's no question of the Terran Navy just...just going away."

"There wouldn't be if you were in command," Canterbury agreed. "Victory or death. But we don't work the same way. Let me tell you what could happen. I don't say it will... After the battle we go home. You crawl out of your holes and realize that to survive, the Colonies must regroup. One big settlement here and elsewhere. Not a tired remnant on Holopan, a few scattered villages on Carambay, a lost city on Hollis and a few exhausted outposts on all the other Colonist planets. That's no way to survive. You've got to bring the survivors here. Right, Horley?"

Horley said nothing.

"I never heard such nonsense," Bloody Mary retorted. "We don't need any immigrants. We can double our population in ten years. We—"

"That's today," said Canterbury. "Tonight, before the battle. I'm talking about after the battle. When you count your losses after the battle, after we've gone back to Earth, you'll find you have to draw in all the out-

posts and try to form one small colony. Probably here. And in about five years, when this must have happened, the Terran Navy could come back. No series of battles all the way from the Solar System to Lavendis this time. One minor battle with what's left of your fleet, and the Colonies are ours. Or—"

Bloody Mary jumped up. "You're trying to talk me into something," she accused.

"Obviously."

"You won't withdraw."

"That's the bit that gets you, isn't it? I thought it might be. Fighting to the death is all very well. But when you make a great sacrifice, the greatest sacrifice, to go on fighting, and the enemy quietly goes away...can't you realize the Colonies just aren't important to Earth?"

"We've always known that," said Horley bitterly.

"So you attacked us just to make yourselves important?"

"Can that," said Bloody Mary impatiently. "Canterbury, do you really mean that the Terran Navy won't follow up? It isn't possible that you're weaker than we thought—that you think you might lose the battle?"

Canterbury smiled. "The most certain thing in this uncertain existence," he said, "is that we'd destroy you to the last man—or woman. Haven't you studied the reports of all the previous engagements?"

"Come to the point," said Bloody Mary.

"Surrender, and all we'll demand is a system of control to make sure no Earth-Colonies war ever happens again."

"We get independence?"

"Depends what you mean. In a way you always had it. In another you never will."

"Damn your riddles. What do you mean?"

"You need people from Earth. Until you don't, how can you be inde-

pendent?"

Bloody Mary sat down. "You don't want reparations?"

"You're bankrupt. What could we take?"

She jumped up again. "We can fight for years yet!" she roared.

"Please," said Canterbury wearily.

"Surrender is impossible."

"Even if you get what you want?"

She frowned. "There's something about this I don't understand," she said.

Canterbury had known she was shrewd enough and had been afraid of this. However he went about it she was bound to smell a rat. Earth could have ended the fighting long ago on the Colonies' terms. It had become a war which could only end in overwhelming defeat for somebody—not in a friendly armistice. Why should Earth suddenly offer reasonable terms?

"All right," he said, with the air of a man admitting something he'd hoped to conceal. "I'll tell you. We're near civil war at home. The United Nations are more disunited than ever. Don't you realize how lucky you've been? You've been losing a war. The Colonies have been welded closer with every defeat. We've been winning. Know what makes allies quarrel? Being successful, always winning, and the war not being over."

"So that's it," said Horley quietly.

"Don't think it's going to do you any good. We can still crush the Colonies. But I want peace now, because unless we get it right now there might be civil war on Earth."

It sounded reasonable. It ought to. Canterbury had worked hard on the story, tailoring it so that it was a commonsense explanation of a desire for armistice without giving the Colonies any hope of victory.

"Oh well," said Bloody Mary. "We'd better hear you, anyway. Horley, get Jenson out of bed. He'll have to be here."

And Canterbury knew he had won.

It would be some time before Earth and the Colonies could be friendly again, would trust each other again. But what happened on the *Chesapeake* showed that in some circumstances friendly relations could be reestablished at once.

A lot of people had to give their permission before Ann Horley was allowed to go back with the Terran Navy flagship. Canterbury pushed the plan through, however, because Ann would look good in the newsreels and it was in Canterbury's interests to get the war forgotten as quickly as possible.

Ann was the only girl on board, and would have been a sensation if she'd been Bloody Mary herself. Being eighteen and pretty and a number of other things she was more than sensational. Captain Russell, who considered he had a prior claim, didn't make any secret of his opinion that the Navy was altogether too friendly towards Ann, and that Ann was altogether too kind to the Navy.

"I can't help it," Ann said once, when she and Russell were with Canterbury in his tiny cabin. "Everybody's been so wonderful. The surrender terms were so magnanimous, my father could hardly believe it, and since then—"

"Yes, the peace terms were magnanimous all right," Russell agreed, with a slightly puzzled glance at Canterbury. "I must say I didn't quite see... You didn't really tell them we were on the brink of civil war at home, sir, did you?"

Canterbury nodded comfortably. He was nothing, nobody on board the flagship now, which suited him very well. He spent most of every day sleeping. His exertions on *Lavendis* had quite tired him out.

"What did you want to do a thing like that for?" Russell asked. "It isn't so. It almost looks as if you



wanted to put the Colonists in the best bargaining position you could."

"So I did," Canterbury agreed. "Otherwise they'd never have made peace."

"Well, I guess you know your own business."

"Of course he does," said Ann warmly. "This way, we can be friends soon. If Earth had been tough with us, there'd have been bitterness for a long time."

"I guess so."

When they had gone, Canterbury lay back and smiled happily at the ceiling. He had never been a man to make unnecessary disclosures—even to show how clever he had been.

Ann was right—a bitter peace sowed the seeds for further conflict. But that wasn't why he had been so magnanimous.

It was a good thing that people in a colony never had time to read. Never had time to study history. Never had time to think. They were always too busy being individualists and pioneers, too busy building and fighting and being free.

Nobody in the Colonies knew how

a strong empire broke up. Canterbury knew: A weaker enemy makes a rash, premature challenge. The empire strikes back and defeats the enemy decisively. This happens again and again, and each time the empire wins. But each time the empire (Roman, Napoleonic or Terran) is weakened, and each time the enemy, if it's a strong enemy, gets tougher and more resolute.

No, the Colonies hadn't been going to win the great battle which never took place. Empires never lose big battles. It's in the comparatively minor skirmishes afterwards that Goliath falls to David.

Then everybody ever afterwards says "Who'd have thought it?" Not realizing, of course, that it isn't the comparatively minor final engagement which breaks the empire.

It's the long series of great victories.

Canterbury's eyes closed. One of these days he'd have to go on a slimming course and see if he could lose about fifty pounds. He really was getting fat.

Presently he began to snore.

## NEXT MONTH—

SKIES OF INFAMY, a new article by LESTER DEL REY

THE REJECTED SORCERER, by JORGE LUIS BORGES

MURDERER'S CHAIN, by WENZELL BROWN

BRUGGIL'S BRIDE, by ROBERT F. YOUNG

BEEP NO MORE MY LADY, by ROBERT BLOCH

and the first instalment of

## THE MIND THING

*an exciting new novel by* Fredric Brown

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# THERE IS AN ABOMINABLE SNOW MAN

by IVAN T.  
SANDERSON

SOME MONTHS ago we reported on a forthcoming case entitled "The People versus Yeti" and we editorialized at that time on its very serious national, international, and possible historical implications. When the case came to court last month we gave it complete coverage and published a considerable amount of the proceedings verbatim. It will be recalled that the case was adjourned for a month at the request of the prosecution after he had called his last witness. With this request the Court concurred after consultation with counsel for the defense, and the court then gave certain instructions to the jury in closed session. An air of mystery prevailed until an extra-ordinary statement was issued to the press yesterday by the Court. The full text of this is published elsewhere for those who wish to study its legal phraseology and who may be able to comprehend its real meaning.

Frankly, we were quite unable to do this without the assistance of our entire legal department and even then there are technicalities which they tell us are beyond their comprehension. This is a sad state of affairs indeed. However, we have asked our se-

nior science writer to prepare the accompanying review of the matter as an introduction to our reports on the renewed court proceedings which began yesterday and which we will be publishing later.

The defendant in the case is *Yeti* but not only is he absent he is even stated (and by the prosecution to boot) to be non-existent. At the same time, the prosecution alleges there is an international conspiracy afoot; and of long-standing, to defraud the people by alleging that there is such a person. But again these conspirators have not been produced and cannot be named. Finally, the prosecution, though calling a very long list of witnesses whom it stated would give evidence of the existence and activities of this gang, did not, the Court felt, produce sufficient concrete evidence to make its case. It was the intention of the court to dismiss the case but then counsel for the defense (of Yeti)—not his supposed promoters, the alleged international plotters, be it noted—inserted a most unusual if not unique plea, to wit, that he be allowed to produce witnesses for the existence of Yeti but against the existence of the said conspirators. This

is when the court recessed *sine die*.

The court has now reconvened under Professor W. C. Osman Hill who is known to have been deeply interested in the case even when he was not presiding. He has issued the first clear statement on the whole subject, in our opinion, and he did this during his opening remarks and when issuing instructions. This is to the effect that, in his opinion, the existence of Yeti has now been fully established but that he reserves judgement on the matter of his alleged backer. He will accept the statements of defense witnesses in evidence of either contention. At last, therefore, we seem to know where we are in this most muddling case and we feel confident that if a conspiracy against the people does exist it will be brought to light and those responsible for it duly punished.

This has become an international court for the trial of cases, stemming from four continents, and which now concerns affairs occurring in more than seventeen countries. However, the court has ordered that five of these be stricken from the record, for the time being at least, although reference to them is to be permitted as evidence in the remainder. Those held over are the North American cases of the *Sasquatch* in Canada, and of *Bigfoot* in California, U.S.A.; of the *Dwendi* in Central America; and the very dubious case of Loy's "Ape" of South America. The first two will be tried at another time in an American court and it is not certain if the public prosecutor will further pursue at all the case of the *Dwendi*. Then, a very curious thing has occurred with regard to Loy's Ape. In this case a scientist has filed a complaint against one Francois Loys and/or his heirs and assignees and one Dr. Bernard Heuvelmanns of Paris, France. Two other cases that have been dropped are those of *Agogwe*, of East Africa, and the unnamed midget of Ghana in

West Africa, both accused of disturbing the peace by the governments of their respective countries—Tanganyika and Ghana. There is also, as of the time of writing, a movement afoot to exclude also the cases of the People versus *Tok*, versus the unnamed procurers and Brown-slave traffickers of Malaya, and versus little *Orang Pendek* of Sumatra with whom there is so much public sympathy and against which not one shred of evidence has been produced showing any criminal intent or even misdemeanour. Of this last case it is being said that there might well be a grave miscarriage of justice on the part of authority in that the little fellow is probably in point of fact a ward of Government, subject to Native Administration and to special protection, and that he is being harassed unlawfully by both foreign scientists and by petty local officials. This case, if it comes to court at all, will doubtless go to the Hague.

This leaves present proceedings to be concerned with eight cases, all Asiatic and all stemming from the area contained within lines drawn from Bokhara in the Soviet Turkoman Republic, northeast to the Republic of Tannu-Tuva, thence southeast to Peking in China, southwest to the northern border of Assam, and finally west again round the curve of the Himalayas to the Pamirs and Bokhara. This encloses the Russian Pamirs; Chinese Sinkiang; Tibet; Inner Mongolia; and the provinces of Chihai, Sikang, Shansi, Kansu, parts of Szechwan, and Yunnan of China; Indian Kashmir; and the States of Bhutan, Nepal, and Sikkim; also a fringe area in northern Assam. It is a vast area, and, despite the fact that it forms the original "nest" of humanity and has been traversed by trade routes for millenia and is now thoroughly administered by the Russians and Chinese, it remains one of the great blanks on our maps and more so in our encyclopedias. It is still for the most part, to the Western World, at least,

substantially unknown. Enormous parts of it are covered by arid deserts or impenetrable mountains and uplands which are completely uninhabited, and most of the rest is very thinly populated. In fact, what population there is is almost exclusively gathered around the few cities and towns or strung out along the trade routes in tiny villages and individual farmsteads. Otherwise there are only roving bands of nomads who stay on the grasslands.

The least known tracts are naturally the uplands and mountains where very few outsiders have ever been. Tibet was not penetrated at all by westerners until the end of the last century and today the greater part of it is still unmapped, unvisited, and as yet unseen by human eye even from the air or by natives of the country. It is also said that if this enormous territory were flattened out its surface area would cover over twenty times what it does geographically on maps due to its outrageous topography. The famous explorer Ronald Kaulbach once roughly surveyed an area the size of Ireland that had never been visited before and yet his extraordinary accomplishment can hardly be spotted let alone depicted on a map of Asia. The entire United States and Alaska can be set within this area without any cutting, rearrangement, or compressing. It is as if the United States were almost entirely mountainous or clothed in deserts, was devoid of all railroads, paved roads, or airlines and was still bordered by Canada and Mexico with their own vast open spaces and limited communications. These facts are needed as background by anybody listening to the proceedings in this case or reading them later. There are also other things that the spectators and readers should know. One of these has never been brought out until now.

If anybody has read anything about this great central Asian region or about the mountainous provinces of

the Himalayas, Tibet, Sikang, and the adjacent areas, and if he has read anything about the case of Yeti, he will almost certainly believe that the whole country is covered with snow or bare rock and lies somewhere up in the clouds. The truth is quite otherwise for, although there are endless towering mountain ranges strung all across the land, and although there are uplands near the snowline twice the size of Texas, a great part of this territory is not only *below* the snowline but it is not bare rock or even mountain pasture. It is clothed in a continuous and incredibly dense forest of coniferous trees and mist-en-shrouded giant rhododendrons that form a tangle almost as impenetrable as mangroves. The valleys at lower altitudes are choked with bamboo-forest or real jungles of every green tropical, subtropical or temperate hardwoods. Again applying the analogy of the United States it is as if that whole country was clothed in a combination of the tropical forests of Central America and the dripping coniferous jungles or the rain-forests of the Pacific Northwest, except for not one but two dozen Rocky Mountain Ranges, leaving open only some vast plantless deserts and a wind-seared upland plateau twice the size of our prairie belt.

There is one other point that should be mentioned though this has not yet been brought out in court. The fact, that it has not, has implications of a very grave nature. This, in this writer's opinion, should have been stated before the case ever came to court and we fail to see why everybody now avoids it so scrupulously—even counsel for defense. Only one witness from the west has even mentioned it, though the Russian material is almost wholly based on it. The point at issue is the nature of not only Yeti but all these other characters here being discussed. Apart from Mr. Thomas B. Slick of Texas, the Russians, and one or two independent scientists, every-

body seems determined to keep this whole question off the record. Yet, it is at the very core of the matter.

The whole case at the moment is being made to revolve around the technical question as to whether Yeti—and/or any of his confreres—exists or not, and if he does not, whether some group of scurrilous human beings have deliberately invented stories of his existence, created his tracks mechanically or otherwise, made phoney scalps of him out of the scrota of yaks or buffalo, obtained the hairs of rare mammals which they claim are from such a creature, and bribed some Himalayan natives to eat whole raw Pikas (a small rodent animal related to hares and rabbits) complete with fur and bones so that their excrement containing the remains of such animals may be collected and pickled.

We would point out that, on the one hand, the question of the existence or non-existence of this creature or creatures must be considerably influenced by consideration of what it might be, or is alleged to be, *in fact*; while, on the other hand, if it *should* prove to exist the authorities, if not the court, should prepare to take appropriate action. If Yeti and his confreres are proved *not* to exist but some dastardly conspirators are identified, the procedure is obvious. If, on the other hand, Yeti and his ilk are found to exist but no conspirators can be named, a state of hopeless confusion and considerable distress is going to be initiated. To put it bluntly, the whole case is being tried on a misleading and inadequate basis. The real question at issue today is not whether Yeti, *et alia*, exist per se or are figments of the minds of some international conspirators, but what the Yeti, Abominable Snowmen, and all the others are.

The prosecution has completely failed, in the opinion of the public, to make its case though no verdict can of course be given until the defense has had its say. The whole case devolves

around identification of the alleged defendant, *in absentia*. The prosecution has failed to produce either yeti or the alleged conspirators. The whole argument has been concentrated on whether either one or the other exists. But by ignoring one alternative—namely, that both might not exist—it has manifestly been implied that *something* does exist. That is one thing that has been accomplished. It is now necessary to proceed to the other alternatives: (1) Do both exist, and if so (2) is Yeti a man-made fake or (3) is he a natural entity or living thing, being exploited by Conspirators. It is obvious from this that, provided the yeti is assumed to exist, it is his nature that really matters and nothing can be assessed unless this question is discussed. As we have said above, this most vital question has so far been almost wholly ignored.

If we assume that yeti and his confreres exist what could they be? Apart from such suggestions as mechanical devices made by man, hallucinations, ghosts, or men wearing masks and costumes, or simply derelict human beings or outcasts living as hermits, there are three alternatives:—

(1) Some race or races of primitive human beings as yet uncontacted by all other human beings.

(2) Some species of Primate mammals probably of the Anthropoid (or Ape as opposed to Monkey), division of that order.

(3) Some species of primate mammals intermediate between the two former; namely, submen, ape-men, man-ape, or manlike ape.

There is something to be said for all these possibilities but the matter is not nearly as simple as the average non-specialist thinks or would like. We are dealing here not merely with one type of alleged creature—the Yeti—but with at least eighteen different types of very considerable variation in shape, size, color and distribution. All cannot be the same. In

fact, in accordance with the normal rules of animal distribution it is extremely unlikely that two species of the same kind would ever be found in the same area unless they occupied very different ecological niches either in different types of vegetation or at different altitudes. Two kinds of the same animal seldom if ever live in the same area—naturally, because if they did so they would immediately hybridize. Moreover, as almost all of these eighteen different alleged creatures are recorded from quite different areas, we have to presume, if not assume, that they are all different.

Then, there is another equally complex matter (at least to the non-specialist) that must be taken into consideration. This is the range of possibilities.

Frankly, it is almost useless to even discuss this whole business, and absolutely worthless to presume to express an opinion upon it, without a clear knowledge and understanding of the overall, current findings of physical anthropology. The writer has been both amazed and appalled to meet highly intelligent people deeply interested in this subject and more than willing to accept the evidence for the existence of such creatures, who nonetheless have never even heard of, let alone considered, the possibility of any of them being other than either human or animal. Further, even basic knowledge of what *is known* to physical anthropology is quite unknown to them. How then, and in the name of all that is true, can such people even start to assess what is recorded? If they do not know what sort of "things" or creatures are possible between what we call man and what we call animal (e.g. apes, in this case) how can they presume to give opinions on the nature of yeti and his confreres? And it is absolutely useless making such statements as that there are no such intermediary types for a whole host of them have now been dug up by palaeontological anthropol-

ogists and are perfectly and absolutely accepted by such specialists as having once existed. These creatures must therefore be listed and annotated.

First, however, a word about that troublesome word *evolution*. Everybody who has heard of this concept has an opinion upon it, and these fall into the usual three categories—believe in it, don't believe in it, or don't give a damn. For our present purposes we may class the first and the last together for neither have anything *against* it. The second class, namely the disbelievers, may be divided into two groups and mostly on a basis of religious prejudices. One lot denies that evolution could exist, as being against their understanding of the methods of the Almighty. The others deny the fact of evolution and especially of our evolution from a lower form of organization such as an ape ancestor, but feel that God may have created a lot of intermediary creatures along with apes and men. The former of these two disbelieving types will positively state that a yeti if found *must* be either a man or an animal: the latter admit the possibility of its being something in between. Finally, there are of course those who believe in the fact of evolution among living things but feel that it is God's method of creation.

It is therefore useless to address that group which positively denies the possibility of any living creature intermediate between man and beast having ever existed. Nonetheless, we now have very considerable positive evidence in the form of fossil skeletons that such creatures *did* exist and in large numbers over more than half the earth for at least a million years. I am afraid, therefore, that the position and attitude of those persons is not tenable and has forthwith to be ignored. Addressing therefore all others, let us see what the position really is.

Anthropological field-workers have

now turned up several dozen skeletons (perhaps thousands, if the work of the Russians be taken into account) of creatures that are neither wholly human by any standards nor wholly non-human in that they display certain pronounced human traits. We humans; these creatures until now thought to be extinct; the apes; the monkeys; the South American monkey-like creatures; the marmosets; the lorisooids; the lemurs; the tiny Tarsiers; and the squirrel-like animals called Tupaia or Tree-Shrews, all belong to one great order of mammals known as that of the Primates. The popular statement that "We are descended from the Apes" is strictly untrue. First, we are not *descended* either in structure or time; we have *ascended*. Second, no ape such as we know those animals today, ever appeared in our family tree. To the contrary, both ourselves and the apes seem to have had a common ancestor that was neither Humanoid, Anthropoid, or even Simioid (i.e. monkeyish). Along the divergent lines to us and to the present-day apes from this ancient common ancestor all sorts of intermediate creatures developed and most of these went off at a tangent as it were, some ending in quite fantastic types, like the giant *Gigantopithecus* of which more in a moment.

Despite all this complexity and the number of different kinds of such intermediaries, or missing links if you like, that have now been found, and the very different status each has on the general family tree, we may legitimately group them in strata of non-humanity, as it were. The simplest method is to allot seven stages to this breakdown, namely:

- (1) *Proto-Ape*, i.e. common ancestor of both anthropoids and humanoids. Possible example *Dryopithecus* of India.
- (2) *Apelike Ape*, i.e. descendants of proto-apes on the branch leading

to the modern apes such as gorillas, chimps, gibbons.

- (3) *Manlike Ape*, i.e. descendants of proto-apes on the humanoid stem or branch. Example, *Proconsul* of East Africa.
- (4) *Man-Ape*, i.e. creatures farther advanced in one way or another up the humanoid stem. Example, the Australopithecines of South Africa.
- (5) *Ape-Man*, i.e. humanoids that still retain non-human or ape-like features. Example, the Pithecanthropines of Java and China.
- (6) *Submen*, i.e. humanoids that are clearly distinguishable from Modern Man, though they may have been able to inter-breed with them. Example, the Neanderthals.
- (7) *Ancient Man*, i.e., obviously wholly humanoid and of the same genus as modern man but with certain anatomical features that are not found in even the most primitive of true Modern Men. Example, fossil skulls from Europe.

All these creatures once existed. We have their bones, and we have the bones of more than one of all of them, so that they are not freaks or individual oddities. They were pure races, breeding true, and mostly over immense periods of time. They were not "crosses"—that escape-clause so beloved of the uninitiated—and the modern methods of dating bones has shown that they are not modern. Intermediate between all these general types there must have been at one time or another an enormous number of additional gradational types of which we have not yet got fossil skeletons. Although evolution sometimes proceeds by jumps due to lucky mutations, on the whole it is a gradual change from one general type to another by the accumulation of lots of little changes.

These fossil humanoids have now been unearthed from all over Eurasia

and Africa. (Note: Ancient Man has now been found in both Australia and North America. Skulls of a Subman type are alleged to have been found in our Southwest but are still under study.) The proto-apes and manlike apes are from deposits of pre-Pleistocene age in Africa and India for the most part. An age of one million years—namely, the beginning of the Pleistocene—is now claimed for the Australopithecines of South Africa. The Pithecanthropines seem to have spread in time from middle Pleistocene to the end of that geological period. The Neanderthalers and other Submen and Ancient Man now appear to have been contemporaries in Europe, Asia, and Africa and to have lasted until the end of the last southward advance of the Ice. Further, it now appears that the earliest Neanderthalers were more “humanoid” than the last representatives of their type. In fact, they progressed backwards, developing ever more ape-like characters. Ancient Man on the other hand did the opposite and it is most interesting to note that the current prevailing opinion of physical anthropologists is that in his earliest known form his nonhuman characteristics are closer to those of the Pithecanthropine Ape-Men than to any other yet found. Finally, there are two very wonderful, very important, but very mysterious creatures to be considered. These are the giant known as *Gigantopithecus* from the cave strata of southern China, and lots of bones of a little creature called *Oreopithecus* found throughout the last sixty years in coalmines in Italy, the strata of which are of Miocene Age. This latter is very, very disturbing.

*Gigantopithecus* was an enormous creature, estimated by Dr. Pei who recently unearthed the first bones (as opposed to teeth) of this thing in caves in Sikang Province of his country to have been up to twelve feet tall. It had many humanoid features and those of its teeth that are known

are almost completely human in form. Yet it is becoming considered more and more to be just on the Anthropoid side of the line rather than on the Humanoid. Definition of this sort is difficult because “human” features do not develop all together. For instance we now know of creatures in which the teeth were human but the face apelike; or again where the feet and hands were human but the brain and teeth completely apelike. In fact, various aspects of these intermediaries seem from time to time to have “run away” towards the human, leaving their other features behind. Reconstructions of this creature, however, coincide very closely with the best descriptions of one of the Abominable Snowmen, as we shall see, and its bones come from an immediately adjacent area.

*Oreopithecus* presents us with a really formidable problem. This creature was first discovered in 1886 and was given its name of “Mountain-Ape” more in fear than in hope for its discoverer had the sense to know that if he had called it *Oreanthropus* or the Mountain-Man, he would have been derided out of his job and his finds probably “lost” or otherwise destroyed. The reason is that the damned thing is a primate with several very if not absolutely human features but it comes from strata that are some 30-million years too early for even the most open-minded skeptic to stomach. Within the last five years a stalwart Swiss scientist has revived these bones and gone to look for more—successfully—but the whole matter is being most carefully suppressed and not one single word has appeared on the subject in scientific literature. The reason for this is more than probably that the new finds have confirmed the original ones and the human characteristics of the creature can no longer be denied. If such facts were published in proper scientific quarters all the anthropological textbooks would have to be completely re-



written and just about every physical anthropologist in the world would have to recant almost every thing he has ever said. That of course is unthinkable. It is much easier and better to suppress the truth and hope that the coalmine will cave in. Then the bones already extracted may be safely destroyed and the "honour" of everybody will be saved.

The sum total of all of this is that there have definitely been considerable numbers of creatures on this earth for tens of thousands and perhaps millions of years that were intermediate between the living apes and living modern man. The next question is, are they all extinct?

The situation here is as muddled as is that of their existence in the past. All kinds of monumental rubbish has been published on this subject, and is thus firmly believed by almost everybody. The popular ideas on what we know of the surface of our earth and what we do not are so completely misconceived and outright inaccurate that it is little short of a miracle that we can even find our way about it. The rubbish that has been written about this subject is also of a near-criminal rather than a merely idiotic nature, so that it seems more than just possible that much of it is deliberate. The basic trouble is the average persons' misconception of size or numbers; the unethical aspects arise from a deliberate failure to multiply accurately. I have dozens of examples in my files, clipped from assumedly reputable publications giving the areas of countries or parts of countries—and especially unexplored parts—that are just plain falsehoods. It is even so bad that in some cases in official publications the length and breadth of an area are given and then the total area is printed but one or more zeros are deliberately left off the latter. The general idea seems to play down at all costs the area of our earth that we do not know and, I now believe, the enor-

mity of space that *is* left for exploitation and human occupancy.

The actual truth is that we know comparatively little of the land surface of our earth, and even less of the sea-surface or more so of its bottom. Over two-thirds of the earth is covered by oceans; between one seventh and one fifth of the total land-surface is permanently frozen; almost one third is desert of one kind or another either hot or cold; a quarter is covered by closed-canopy forest most of it totally untouched and the largest block of it in Russia and Siberia. Only one state in the Union of North America is adequately mapped (this is Massachusetts); there are areas up to 100,000 square miles in that Union that are not mapped at all; there are enormous areas in Australia, Asia, Africa, South and North America that have never been penetrated; whole islands that have been inhabited for thousands of years (vide: Sardinia) prove to be tens of miles off their true position on the best maps; and there are even places within fifty miles of our largest cities that have not been used since pre-columbian times. There are Amerindians living in Central America, not two hours flight from Miami, who have never yet been seen by or contacted by anybody, and whole parties of civilized men have vanished into places near ports in New Guinea and on other more modest islands. There are two million square miles of spruce and aspen forest in the northwest part of Canada that has an estimated human population of only 25,000; there is a hundred square mile strip in New Jersey that has no human population at all. The truth is, we simply do not know anything much about the land surface of our earth.

But benighted idiots who have never been outside their home towns or small areas of their own counties have the audacity to state—in print, and as "experts," forsooth—that this, that, or the other thing *cannot* exist some-

where. This sort of statement is not only absurd and ridiculous, it is manifestly pure mendacity or even worse. It is a deliberate effort to defraud the public, and the methods employed by such persons would in any other circumstance be deemed criminal, for they are exercising unwarrantedly their positions as experts. They are *not* experts; they are damned fools; and, frankly, nothing that any of them say should any longer be given credence, and should be held in direct suspicion until *they* can bring evidence to support their claims. The onus is wholly upon them.

The truth of the matter is that our world is not by any means explored as yet and what of it is mapped is in large measure inadequately known. Just because even a large-scale map is covered with names does not mean that any of it has been visited. A large percentage of mountains have only been seen from the air; the same applies to rivers whose courses are later sketched in. We once worked out the actual size of a dot on an "i" in the word Pacific in an atlas and found that it would be 400 miles wide if put down on that ocean in proportionate size. There is ample room even in our own country for there to be all manner of even large as yet undiscovered living things in considerable quantities.

Then again, over a million species of animals are now known and named but the list is added to annually by some thousands. Most of these are admittedly small or very small but most of the work of looking for them is being done in the more populated countries and parts of countries. The vast majority of the earth is not being searched at all. Fairly large and even very large animals are still turning up on land. The second largest living land mammal—a race of the Ceratotherium or "White Rhinoceros"—was not found till this century; the same went for the horse-sized Okapi. One of the largest species of ox of a quite

fabulous form with tasselled horns and called the Couprey did not come to light until 1938, and in heavily and anciently populated Indo-China at that! The vast *taiga* or spruce forests of Siberia were never glaciated and what they contain is simply not known. Even the Australian Government has stated officially that a marsupial tiger probably exists in the Cape York peninsula. What may not exist in the endless valleys and gorges of the Himalayas that are choked with a tangled mat some thirty feet deep of evergreens cannot of course be said by anybody not even the local inhabitants though, be it noted, they say almost to a man that some unknown creatures *do* live there—to wit at least three ABSMs, known as the Yeti, or Yeh-Teh, the medium *Mih-Teh*, and the giant fellow, or Dzu-Teh.

There is no reason at all why all submen or apemen, or even men-apes and manlike apes should be extinct. Almost if not all other large animals are more primitive and have been around much longer; more than a dozen species of apes are still alive and the largest of these, the gorilla, was not found till the middle of the last century or believed in even then by the scientific world for almost another half century. Large animals like the Red Deer, Moose, Brown Bears, and so forth crossed to North America from both Asia and Europe after the retreat of the last ice sheet so why not a subman to settle down and still exist in the almost endless vastnesses of British Columbia (the Sasquatch) or the 50,000 empty square miles of the Klamath Mountains in northern California (Bigfoot)?

And this brings us back to the very pertinent questions that are now being raised by the defense. Ordinary, normal, sane, intelligent citizens—such as you, the jury, cannot be expected to assess this case if you have not before you first a clear statement of the possibilities of what you are discussing, and secondly the true na-

ture of the terrain where they are alleged to have been found. If all information on the former is denied you, and the only statements on the latter are made by deliberate liars, how can you be expected to come to any logical conclusions? How can you even judge the statements of those who have been to these places and who really *do* know their nature and extent?

Therefore, it is necessary to state flatly that the allegations of the prosecution—being without any supporting evidence—may be totally ignored. So also should be those of all “experts” unless the person making the statement can prove that he or she has actually been in the area concerned, has properly investigated the business, and has adjudged the matter from a logical point of view and without prejudice. Third, the reports made by those who have been there who are not or do not claim to be experts should be most carefully listened to, though the extent of their background knowledge should at the same time be most thoroughly investigated. For instance, in this case, if a reputable explorer says he has encountered a yeti and endeavours to express an opinion as to what it is but has no previous knowledge of the intermediate creatures between apes and men that are known to anthropologists, you should treat his conclusions with the utmost caution. What is more, in such a case, a sound grounding in and knowledge of say ethnology and/or zoology of the area may be as dangerous as none at all of either, for a pre-conceived notion may well be firmly established in the narrator's mind. As an example, I know of more than one properly trained scientist who has actually been on an expedition to seek evidence of the abominable snowman who completely missed several items of the utmost importance (that were later turned up by others) simply because his whole interest and all his specialized knowledge was in another

field. When they saw facts staring them in the face these good men endeavoured to interpret them in some way that coincided with their own special beliefs.

That some of these creatures—and I would like to use our private term to include all of them from now on, i.e. ABSMs—could be run-away human criminals of known tribes, or members of as yet un-contacted human races is of course possible; but not all of them could be such. It seems more than just possible that the *Almas* of central Asia may be very primitive illiterates. That some ABSMs could be Anthropoids is equally possible and, in the case of the very big Abominable Snowman, or Dzu-teh seems both probable and even likely. It could be *Gigantopithecus*. However, now that it is definitely known that the exceedingly primitive and apelike Man-Apes called the Australopithecines of South Africa used a very wide variety of rather complicated bone tools (see recent publications of Dr. Broom, of the University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa) the line between the Anthropoid and the humanoid has become even more blurred. ABSMs could be and probably are of all these types.

Is there any evidence that any of the ABSMs are specifically of any of the types of intermediate hominoid-anthropoids? Yes, there is indeed, and apart from the possible consanguinity of the big Abominable Snowman and *Gigantopithecus*; the Agogwe of East Africa and *Australopithecus*; and the Orang Pendek of Sumatra and some Pitecanthropine. Moreover, this has been for some extraordinary reason—if not deliberately—overlooked although it has been published in great detail with photographs for a number of years in reputable scientific journals and magazines. The likeness here is between the middle sized abominable snowman or *Mih Teh* and the European Neanderthaler

of the middle period of the last ice-advance. The evidence is perfectly factual and straightforward and is as follows:

In the fall of 1953 the two caretakers of a cave located north of Florence, in Italy, which is a tourist attraction—(all caves in Italy are public property and their caretakers are appointed by the state)—applied to the government for permission to do some blasting and digging during the winter at the back of their cave. They had noticed that one of the passages was obviously blocked by a solid wall of flowstone, the material of which stalactites and stalagmites are composed, rather than by the ordinary surrounding country-rock in which the cave was formed. Also, these were small holes down near the bottom of this flowstone barrier into which air blew at another time, and bats had been seen darting into and out of one of these holes. Permission was obtained and the men blasted through no less than eleven feet of this barrier and broke into an extensive series of passages.

These tunnels had been sealed up completely for a very long period of time estimated at the time of their discovery to be some 70,000 years though today the time-scale of the last southward ice-advance in Europe has been considerably contracted. The caves were smooth-walled and were floored with what is called "cave-earth" actually in this case a very fine, rather sticky, clayey mud. On this floor, as perfectly preserved as the day they were made were endless lines of foot-tracks of three creatures—an enormous bear, some modern-type men, and Neanderthalers. There were also many bones, stone artifacts left by both the modern-type or postglacial man and by the Nean-

derthalers. charcoal circles on the walls into which mud balls had been cast in some form of game, and other things. Numbers of most accurate casts of the Neanderthaler footprints were taken. They are very odd and quite unlike those of either the bear or the modern-type humans being short, very broad, with large broad toes put on squarely, a very big "big-toe" and a very big "little-toe." They were only eight to ten inches long.

Casts of the middle-sized Abominable Snowman—or Mih Teh—taken in the Himalayas are not only identical, they can be turned over and fitted exactly into negative size casts of the Neanderthalers taken in this cave in Italy. No known creature living or extinct makes a track anything like these two.

What more can one ask? And why is there any more discussion about all this? Simply, I would suggest because nobody, and even those seemingly most keen to capture an ABSM, really wants the problem solved. As a lady wrote to me at the end of a very long and intensely interesting correspondence about the monsters of Loch Ness on which she had written the best book yet published "...and anyhow, I'd much rather have a mystery unsolved than one that is fully explained." All this is a sad commentary on the true nature of human nature. Yet it has got to be taken into account when trying to assess the evidence for the existence of ABSMs and all the extraordinary things that have been and are being said in an endeavour to discredit that evidence, disprove it, explain it, or explain it away. These broad facts are actually more important than all the details of the reports of these creatures existing, as we shall abundantly see when we come to review those reports.

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# MERCENARIES UNLIMITED MERCENARIES UNLIMITED MERCENARIES UNLIMITED MERCENARIES UNLIMITED

by DAVID GORDON

LYING flat on my belly while a couple of groups of desperate men spray the surrounding territory with large, high-velocity slugs, and fill the local atmosphere with the flickering blue light of meson gun discharges is not my idea of either comfort or security. It is not even my idea of fun, except when talking about it afterwards over a quiet beer. If a man could be sure he would be able to talk about it afterwards, it might be more fun, but that sort of positive knowledge is rare in any business, and downright impossible in mine.

The trouble was that I was right in the big, fat middle of a No-Man's-Land between two contending parties, each of which wanted me alive, but would rather see me dead than have the other bunch get me. The only thing I didn't have to worry about was getting hit by a meson gun beam; neither of the parties would deliberately hit me with something that would ruin what they were look-

ing for. No, if I was shot deliberately, it would be by a common, or garden variety, bullet. Still, in the excitement, someone might accidentally wing me with an energy beam. People do funny things when they're excited.

As long as they were holding each other off, I was relatively safe. That time, however, might only be a matter of minutes, so I thought it the better part of common sense to try to dope out a fast get away, if it was possible. I took a deep breath through my air mask and tried to calm my nerves. The crackle of rifle slugs through the thin Martian air didn't help my nerves any.

I was lying on the flat top of a high building, protected from the flying death around me by nothing more than a couple of two-foot stone walls that ran around the edge of the roof. Patterson's men were closest to me, on a roof adjoining mine, just to the west, but about five feet lower than

my own roof, and separated by a three-foot space from the building I was on. In order to hit me, a gunman would have to stand straight and then boost himself a little to fire over the two-foot roof-wall.

But that would make the gunner a sitting duck for Ch'ien Tsung George's men, who were on the roof to the east—on my left. They were on a level with me, but there was a twenty-foot space between my building and theirs. As long as I stayed flat, neither side could get me without exposing a man, and that man would stand a better chance of dying than he would of getting me.

The battle had been going on the better part of three minutes before I made up my mind that I had better get out before someone decided to toss a sleep grenade over the parapet and end the whole thing. A sleep grenade would knock everyone out for a hundred yards around, but if either group had reinforcements coming, the reinforcements would be able to take over.

In that case you're wondering how a three-minute gun battle could take place on the roofs of a Martian city without the cops landing in swarms and putting the quietus on all and sundry, then I'd better explain. Granted, if we'd been fighting under one of the domed cities—New Boston, Dullesgrad, Nuova Venezia, or any of the others—then the fight wouldn't have lasted a minute. Aside from other considerations, the local citizens and their police officers frown on the idea of anyone shooting off weapons that might puncture the city dome. It would take a hell of a big hole to do any real harm, but even small ones are nuisances.

But we weren't fighting on human-built buildings. We were way the hell and gone out in the middle of the Xanthus Desert, on the rooftops of a city that was built before the native Martians died out, half a million Earth years ago. The corners have

been rounded off on those buildings during that time, but the thin, dry air of Mars doesn't weather granite very quickly; Mars has no rainfall, no earthquakes, and not much wind, so a good, solid granite building can sit around for a good many millenia without changing much. Those buildings are just about as strong as they ever were.

At that moment, though, I wished they weren't. I would have liked to be able to dig a hole in that stone roof. Unfortunately, that wasn't even remotely possible, and, to make things worse, there wasn't an opening of any kind in the flat surface of the roof. I could dig through half an inch of fine, drifted sand, but I didn't figure that would help much.

As far as I knew, there wasn't any way off the roof. I'd run myself into a dead end. I'd come up through the roof of the building that Patterson's men now occupied. That bunch had chased me into the next-door building and up the sloping ramps that the Martians used instead of stairways. And there had been no way I could go except up. I didn't fancy getting myself caught between floors, where I'd have to crouch down to move; the Martians were little fellows, and thought that four-and-a-half-foot ceilings were adequate for anyone. So I had kept on going up the zig-zag ramp until I'd reached the roof. Then I'd taken a flying jump across the short space that separated that building from the next—the one I was on now.

For all of half a second, I thought I could get away by roof-jumping. But while I was still in the air a bullet snapped past my ear. Ch'ien Tsung George's boys had been following us, but they'd evidently made a mistake as to which building we'd gone in, so they found themselves on the roof of the next building over.

About that time, Patterson's lads had boiled up out of the same trap door that I'd used to get to the roof



and tried to come after me, only to be caught by a blast of fire from the Chinaman's forces.

Which, of course, left me neatly trapped in the middle. I was on the roof of a building, nine floors above the ground, with a battle going on inches over my head.

I knew that somewhere on that roof there was a trapdoor leading back inside it; all Martian buildings have them. They're easy to find from beneath, but that roof was covered with half an inch of sand and dust which had drifted in over the ages, and I didn't feel like brushing off the whole roof to find the door.

There was a way out, but I didn't fancy to it too much. What decided me was one of Patterson's men. A couple of his friends must have boosted him up from the lower roof next door. He shot up fast and tried to get in a blast—whether it was at me or at Ch'ien's men, I never knew. A couple of slugs from the Chinaman's side slammed into him before he could do anything, and his meson gun flared harmlessly into the Martian twilight. I knew then that I had to move—fast.

Night comes fast on Mars. The thin air doesn't refract light the way Earth's does, so twilight doesn't last long. In a minute or so, it would be dark, and all sorts of sorties and forays would be going on in that blackness. Both of the Martian moons were in the sky, but those two little bits of rock give off so little light that they're no brighter than stars.

Figuring that it was a case of "get going or get got", I started edging myself toward the north wall of the building. I could hear firing down below now; somebody had decided that the way to get me was to come up to this building from the inside, and the other side had thought of it, too. I moved faster, worming my way across that flat roof, through the fine sand.

When I reached the two-foot wall that bordered the roof, I took another deep breath. Then, moving faster

than I'd ever thought I could move, I pushed myself up and rolled over the parapet, to drop nine floors to the ground beneath.

If this were the scenario for 3D-TV merchandise opera, I would probably leave the story hanging right here while some oily-voiced chap belabored you with the wonders of owning a Fiat-Ford aircar, then told you to be sure and watch tomorrow to see if I'd come out all right. But anyone who stops to remember what he's been taught since primary school—that the gravitational pull of Mars at its surface is one-third that of Earth's—wouldn't even bother to worry about it.

It sounds simple. Nine Martian floors, at five feet to the floor, or thereabouts, gave me forty-five feet to fall. But at a gravitational acceleration only one-third that of Earth, it was no worse than dropping fifteen feet. At the rate I was dropping, my velocity at the end of a forty-five-foot fall was no greater than it would have been at the end of a fifteen-foot fall on Earth. I don't recommend it for casual exercise, mind you, but if you know how to land properly, all you'll end up with is minor bruises. Ask any good pole-vaulter.

But for Earth-born and Earth-raised human beings, the very distance itself causes a mental block. Try looking out of a fifth-story window sometime. You can tell yourself that under Martian gravity you wouldn't be hurt, but unless you're used to it, unless you've really *lived* with it, your argument to yourself isn't very convincing.

I lit with a thump in the soft sand and rolled across the narrow Martian street after taking up the shock by using my legs as shock-absorbers. I jumped to my feet and ran as though all the Fallen Angels of Hell were tailing me in a Marathon race. Behind me, I could still hear the crack and sizzle of gunfire, but whether that in-

licated that my getaway hadn't been seen, or whether it meant that they were too busy with each other to bother just yet, I didn't know.

All I wanted to do was put plenty of distance between myself and twenty-odd killers.

Running on Mars is another thing that takes training and practice. A man who isn't used to the lighter gravity can get all tangled up in his own feet pretty easily. I was thankful at that point that *Mercenaries Unlimited* gives their field agents an exhaustive training course before they'll even let him handle the simplest assignment. Given any chance at all, I could get clean away before the triggermen got around to figuring out what had happened to the quarry they were fighting over.

Actually, things were working out better than I'd expected. Patterson's and Ch'ien's men had followed me here, neither group knowing that the other was on my tail, and both of them thinking that I was unaware that I was being followed. Except for the tight spot I'd got into on the roof, everything was going pretty much as planned. I only hoped things would keep working out the way they had been.

The assignment hadn't been an unusual one. There's no such thing as an unusual assignment for *Mercenaries Unlimited*.

Still, it had all started rather harmlessly; it had looked as though it were an ordinary, everyday, commonplace job. Sure. Real easy.

*Mercenaries Unlimited*, the ads always said. The sign on our central building always says the same thing. Underneath are the words: *we do anything—for a price.*

And we do. That's our business. If you can meet the tariff, you can get anything—but *anything*—done by *Mercenaries Unlimited*. You name the job, we name the price, and if we can come to terms, the job gets done

Ch'ien Tsung George had the job for us, and he had the wherewithal to back it up, so the contact man listened to him. I wasn't the contact man; a field agent doesn't often meet the client he's working for because that might cause strained client-agent relationships, and that, in turn, might be unprofitable.

But I had seen the full tapes of the meeting and the preliminary arrangements, so I had a pretty good idea of what I was getting into. When I was given the assignment, my immediate superior, Colonel Battersea, brought the tapes in to my office.

Colonel Battersea got his title in the Space Service, which is enough commendation for any man. He'd kept the title because he deserved it, even among *Merc Unltd* men, and that's more commendation than the average man deserves.

Colonel Battersea wasn't of course, an average man. He had, and still has, more intelligence in his *medulla oblongata* than the average man has in his cerebrum and cerebellum combined. He's a little man, a good four inches shorter than my six-two, but I still wouldn't want to tackle him in hand-to-hand combat. Not that I couldn't whip him, but I'd certainly hate myself afterwards if I did.

He dropped the tape magazine on my desk, and hunched his shoulders up—an odd little habit he has whenever he begins a conversation. "That's yours, son. Run it through, then erase it. The file copy is already on record." He pushed it toward me with one finger, as if he didn't care to touch it any more than necessary.

I picked it up and looked at him. "You don't like it, Colonel?" I asked.

The Colonel lifted an eyebrow. "I don't *dislike* it. It's a job, and I have nothing in particular against it."

I held the plastic box and wondered what was on the tape inside. "You don't particularly love it either, Colonel," I said. "What's the trouble?"

"I don't particularly love metallic plutonium or liquid flourine," he said, "and I don't dislike them, either. I'd just as soon not be bothered with playing with them, that's all. A man might get hurt." He wagged a finger at the tape magazine. "Run it. We can talk about it afterwards."

I dropped the magazine into the receptacle, made sure the toggle was engaged, and then flipped the projection switch on my desk control panel. It was unusual for Colonel Battersea to stay while one of his operatives ran off an assignment tape; usually these things are so cut and dried that there's no necessity of drawing a picture of them.

The 3D tank in the wall came to life, and I watched Ch'ien Tsung George come into the contact man's office.

I'm a devotee of the old film classics; it's a hobby with me. I've got taped replicas of some of the soundless films, dating back nearly a century, including a Fatty Arbuckle replica that cost more than I'd care to admit. But my favorites are some of the "horror" and "detective" flicks of the 1930's. So maybe you'll understand what I mean when I say that Ch'ien Tsung George reminded me of Sydney Greenstreet playing the part of Fu Manchu. As far as I know, Greenstreet never played the part, but if he had he'd have been Ch'ien Tsung George to the life.

Mr. Ch'ien liked to play the part of an old-fashioned Chinese. He even insisted on the old Chinese custom of putting his family name first and his given name last, though why he didn't go whole hog and adopt a Chinese given name along with the rest is something I'll never know. Actually, he had been born in the state of Hawaii, as had his parents and grandparents before him, and he was only half Chinese—a quarter from each parent—the rest being a mixture of Japanese, Filipino, and

Scot-Irish. He had been born George Matsuoaka, forty-some years before, but he'd decided he didn't like the Japanese name and had adopted a Chinese one instead. He might equally as well have called himself O'Brien or MacTavish, but I guess he figured he looked far too Oriental for that.

He stood six feet tall and weighed well over three hundred. His belly preceded him into the room as though it were a herald with a trumpet, announcing that the great man was to follow in a few moments. His chins were multiple, and the top one, the only one backed by a jawbone, was covered with a dark, straight-haired beard that fell stringily to his collar. Above the beard, his full lips were framed by the mustache that complemented the chin beard. His round cheeks were clean-shaven, and his brows were heavy; below them, were black, expressionless eyes with a pronounced epicanthic fold. His hair was black, but it was thin and balding, and he kept it combed straight back, flat against his skull. His chin was a surprising pink, showing neither the faint tan of the Oriental nor the more pronounced tan that comes from spending time in the sun.

"I was told that I was to see a Mr. Corwin," he said, in a soft, rumbling voice. "I presume that you are he?"

Corwin, the preliminary contact man, smiled and extended his hand. "That's right, Mr Ch'ien. May I offer you a chair?"

Ch'ien Tsung George took the hand, shook it quickly, and then took the chair. It was obviously a relief for him to get all that poundage off his feet and let it rest on his buttocks, where it belonged.

"I am grateful for your hospitality, Mr. Corwin," he said. He patted the arms of the chair. "It is not often that a man of my—ah—bulk finds that adequate preparations have been made to accommodate him."

The chair was a special one—

broad, stronger, and more thickly padded than the average. Just one of the little services that *Mercenaries Unlimited* extends to its customers.

"We feel," said Corwin blandly, "that a comfortable customer is a more satisfied customer." He was already mixing a drink for each of them, and when he set one in front of Ch'ien, the fat man looked up appreciatively.

"You even know that my favorite afternoon drink is a Planter's Punch. I feel very humble and honored." But his black eyes were shrewdly calculating. "Am I to presume that your excellent organization has already deduced why I have come to you?"

Corwin shook his head. "Not at all, Mr. Ch'ien. We make it our business to know certain things about our customers and potential customers—little things that will enable us to serve them better. We do not make it a policy to pry into their private lives."

That last, of course, was an out-and-out lie. We definitely *do* make it a policy to know everything, private and public, about everyone. But it wouldn't be good politics to admit that to our customers.

"I see," George said coolly, looking as though he didn't believe a word of what Corwin had said. Ch'ien Tsung George was no moron. "Then I shall be pleased to tell you what I want—after we have finished our drink together."

"At your pleasure, Mr. Ch'ien," said Corwin, sipping at his Planter's Punch. Corwin is one of our best contact men—suave, smooth, and polite. He was in his late thirties at the time, but he was as good then as he is now. Physically, he hasn't changed much—handsome without being "pretty", with a brush of gray at his temples, smoothly waved brown hair, a mustache that covered just the right amount of upper lip, and a face that could express any emotion from total apathy, through anxiety, anger, and

boredom, clear up to triumphant joy, without betraying in the least what was actually going on in his mind. Right now, he looked as though he was enjoying Ch'ien's company and wanted nothing more than to sit and drink with him the rest of the afternoon.

Ch'ien Tsung George smiled a smile that crinkled his Oriental eyes. "You are very kind, Mr. Corwin. Very kind. I trust—" He chuckled heavily. "I trust I am not taking up too much of your time."

Corwin, judging his customer accurately, gave him the full charge.

"Mr. Ch'ien, you are paying for my time at the rate of one hundred International Credits per hour. Frankly, I enjoy your presence. The fact that I get paid for it is of little matter to me. I will discuss any matter you wish from now until Doomsday, if that is your pleasure. I will endeavor to be entertaining, but if, at any time, you find me dull, we can terminate the conversation at that moment. Until then, I am your servant."

Ch'ien repeated his heavy chuckle. "I understand. Very well. To business, then. You know, I presume, that I am a lover of fine *objets d'art*?"

Corwin nodded. "I know that you are a well-known and enthusiastic collector of beauty—of many kinds. So?"

"*Touche*," said Ch'ien. "Then you know of my gem collection?"

"I've heard of it, naturally. I don't know all the details," Corwin lied carefully.

Ch'ien Tsung George folded his hands across his great paunch. "I'm sure you do," he said cryptically, "therefore, I will not go into detail. I will only say that one of my many ambitions is to have the most completely representative collection of gems in the Solar System." He gestured idly with his tapering hands. "One day, when I die, I shall will my collection to the Solar Institute. It will be a small gesture, but it will, I

think, insure that my name will be remembered."

"I'm certain it will," Corwin murmured.

Ch'ien leaned forward in the big chair. "I have not attempted to get every famous stone that has ever existed. Only the best. The Star of India is mine, as is the Parlotta Ruby, but I do not covet the rest of the British Crown Jewels. But there is one stone missing from my collection." And then he leaned back, waiting for Corwin to ask the obvious question.

Corwin took his cue. "Which stone is that, Mr. Ch'ien?"

"The Heart of Xanthus," Ch'ien said flatly.

Corwin looked at his drink, swirling it gently, while he thought. He showed no sign of surprise, which proved him to be a good contact man. "The Heart of Xanthus," he said after a moment, "is in the Museum of Martian Artifacts and Culture, at New Boston, Mars. Have you approached them directly for purchase of the stone?"

Ch'ien's chuckle bordered on a sneer. "Come, now, Mr. Corwin. You know better than that."

"I'm not sure I do," Corwin said. His voice was gentle, but the meaning was all there.

"Your pardon," said Ch'ien. He sounded almost apologetic. "Permit me to elucidate. In the first place, I am fully aware that the so-called Heart of Xanthus now on display at the New Boston Martian Museum could not be purchased by a private individual—not even myself. In the second place, I am fully aware that, even if I commissioned you to steal it—pardon my frank language—it would do me no good to have possession of the gem in New Boston." He unclasped his hands and formed a finger-to-finger steeple of them over his huge paunch. "In the third place, that gem is not the one I want at all."

"Oh?" said Corwin. "Perhaps you'd better explain."

"I shall." Again he heaved his ponderous build forward in the chair, his black eyes intent upon Corwin's face. "You know as well as I do that the gem in New Boston is not the true Heart of Xanthus. According to archaeological studies, it is merely a replica, a replica built by the ancient Martians themselves. Evidently, according to what Earthmen have been able to decode of the language of the dead Martian race, the stone now in the New Boston Museum was built for display purposes, just as we might build a model of some expensive object in order to display in public something that could not be displayed in the original. Am I right?"

Corwin spread his hands noncommittally. "As far as my knowledge of the subject goes, you are perfectly correct." Then he waited for Ch'ien to go on.

"Very well, then," the fat man said. "What I want is the *original* stone—the *real* Heart of Xanthus."

Corwin knew his business. He looked at his hands and then rubbed the palms gently together. Then he looked up at Ch'ien and smiled apologetically. "Mr. Ch'ien, archeologists have been looking for the original of that stone for twenty years. The duplicate itself is a seven thousand carat diamond, more or less; it's volume is on the order of four hundred cubic centimeters, as I recall." Corwin allowed his voice to drone, as though he were quoting from a textbook he'd read years before. "The gem is a perfect octohedral diamond crystal, measuring a little more than seven inches along—"

Ch'ien cleared his throat rumblingly and held up a plump, pink hand. "Please, Mr. Corwin! I assure you that, as a gem collector, I am fully aware of the physical properties and dimensions of the New Boston replica. As you have pointed out, your time is costing me a hundred credits

an hour. Not that I begrudge so small a sum, but—please come to the point.”

Corwin had bated his man to exactly where he wanted him. He looked properly conciliatory and said: “There is another duplicate of the Heart of Xanthus in the Smithsonian Institute in Washington City, U.S.A.; there is a third in the British Museum in London, England, and a fourth in the Kremlin Museum of Moscow, Greater Russia. These last three replicas are, of course, human-made synthetics—artificially produced genuine diamonds, made at a cost of some eight hundred thousand credits each. None of them has the star-like optical flaws that give the New Boston replica its individuality. We have still not achieved the technological level that the Martians achieved fifty thousand years ago—at least, not as far as being able to duplicate the artifact that is epitomized by the Heart of Xanthus.”

Ch'ien started to speak, but Corwin said: “Bear with me a moment. I am merely pointing out that the Heart of Xanthus, third-hand—the replicas of a replica—costs eight hundred thousand credits. And you want, not the Martian replica, but the original itself.

“In addition, let me point out that there is no real evidence that the mythical original ever existed, and no evidence at all that it exists now.”

Corwin held up a finger. “In other words, your project, as you've stated it, would cost money—a great deal of money. And there is almost no chance at all that you would be able to attain your goal—to gain possession of the real, original Heart of Xanthus.

“We are in business to give service to our customers, Mr. Ch'ien, but we discourage their spending money on wild-goose-chases. It isn't good for our own business.”

Again Ch'ien tried to interrupt, and again Corwin silenced him with a wave of his hand. “I'm fully aware,” Corwin said, “that you wouldn't come

here without knowing what you were about. Which means, of course, that you have information unknown to us. Do you wish to go on?”

Ch'ien Tsung George relaxed in his chair and smiled complacently. “You must pardon me, Mr. Corwin; I underestimated your sagacity. I do, indeed, have secret information. I shall be happy to explain—and, as you would not permit me to interrupt you, I beg that you shall observe the same convention towards my own exposition. Eh?”

Corwin nodded. “Go on.”

Ch'ien Tsung George folded his hands together and held them under his bearded chin. “To begin with, let us take the Martian language. I have made a great study of it, and, at the moment, it pleases me to expound on my knowledge.

“The Martian race has been extinct for five hundred thousand years. But they left behind them certain markings on stone, metallic plates, ceramic artifacts, and so forth. When these were first discovered, archeologists despaired of ever decoding them or translating them. There could be no equivalent of the Rosetta Stone, since there was no possibility that parallel, coeval transcriptions of any Martian writing and any Terrestrial writing could exist. Even if they had had space travel—which is unlikely—the last Martian died before Terrestrial Man had invented writing. There could be no common basis for deciphering the Martian texts on that ground. Do you follow me?”

Corwin merely nodded.

“Very well,” Ch'ien continued, “then how were the Martian texts finally deciphered?” He extended his left hand and tapped forcefully on its palm with the forefinger of his right. “Because—and *only* because—the Martians had a highly scientific civilization. As soon as our scientists realized that, they were able to decipher those things which were, are, and *must be* common in any two lan-

guages of scientifically advanced peoples."

He began ticking them off on his fingers. "The ratio of a circle's diameter to its radius is the same all over the Universe. So are the relative weights of the atoms. So is Planck's Constant. These, and others, were the common Rosetta Stone that enabled us to translate ancient Martian."

Corwin nodded again. He knew all this, but it wasn't his business to look bored.

"In addition," Ch'ien went on, "we have the few hints that we get from the present, half-intelligent denizens of Mars. We don't know whether the present Martians are degenerate mutations of the ancient Martian race, or simply mutated specimens of an inferior species. It is as if some interstellar explorer were to land on Earth at some future date and find that the only near-intelligent race happened to be a group of ape-like sub-men, living on a planet that had been decimated by an atomic war half a million years before. Would that hypothetical explorer know whether the sub-men were degenerate human mutants or the changed descendants of chimpanzees, who had climbed up the evolutionary scale instead of being pushed down? How could he know?"

"The present-day Martians speak a language that is not, so far as we can tell, related at all to Old Martian. Their vocabulary and usage is sparse, reflecting the fact that their intelligence, by human standards, is sub-moronic. They have, for instance, no notion of time: they express the past by saying the equivalent of: 'before me came'. Psychologists have tried to bring up Martians away from their present culture, and have shown that their ability to think abstractly is almost non-existent. They are hardly a step above the animal.

"Nonetheless, they *do* have folk tales. And these folk tales, combined with the scientific deciphering of Old Martian writings, have enabled us to

read the Old Martian inscriptions fairly accurately—as far as we can tell."

Ch'ien Tsung George settled himself in his chair and stroked his beard with one hand. "I have delivered myself of my lecture, Mr. Corwin. I have no doubt that you are aware of all these facts, but they form a necessary background to what I have to say next." He paused, ran his fingers through his beard, and went on.

"As you are no doubt aware, the Museum in New Boston has been looking for the true, the original Heart of Xanthus for a long time. Now, I do not intend to tell you how I came about this information, but I do know for a fact that the New Boston scientists have translated certain Old Martian writings, and they have kept these translations secret because the writings themselves give hints as to where the original Heart of Xanthus is hidden—buried beneath the drifting sands of Mars."

And now, again, the fat man leaned forward earnestly. "The ultimate point is this: I, too, have certain information regarding the location of the original Heart of Xanthus—information which is unknown to the archeologists at New Boston, Mars, or to any other person except myself. The two areas of data may overlap at tiny points, but, in general, they are mutually supplementary. It is as though I held one half of a treasure map and they held the other; neither of us could find the treasure without the other half of the map. Do you follow?"

"I think so," said Corwin. "Neither you nor the New Boston research group has enough information to find the Heart of Xanthus, but—according to you—if your information were combined, the mythical—pardon me, *legendary*—jewel could be found."

"Exactly," said Ch'ien Tsung George, settling back firmly. "Exactly."

Corwin took a cigarette from his pocket case, tapped it alight, put it between his lips, took a drag, and exhaled a plume of smoke before he answered. He wanted to think, and he was stalling for time. He took another drag before he said: "As a preliminary, we will hypothetically concede that all this is true. Assuming that it is, Mr. Ch'ien, what is your proposition?"

The fat man looked highly self-satisfied. "I propose an agreement which will be satisfactory to both of us, *whether or not my hypothesis is correct.*"

Corwin waited.

"It is very simple," Ch'ien said. "I know, as does all the civilized Solar System, that *Mercenaries Unlimited* never violates a contract, even though many of your contracts are not only un-enforceable in a court of law, but actually, in some cases, downright illegal. In spite of this, as I say, you have always lived up to your contracts."

"Provided," Corwin interjected, "that our client lives up to his end of the bargain."

Corwin wasn't being diplomatic there; he was simply expounding on Ch'ien's statement, which was perfectly true: *MercUn* has never welshed on a contract. It's perfectly true that some of our work is illegal—or, as the courts put it, "contrary to the public welfare", but, considering the weakness of the central government of the Solar System, and the state of affairs that exists between the loosely confederated Commonwealths on the three planets, there is no reason to pay any attention to the courts if their decisions can be avoided.

There are four Commonwealths on Earth, two on Mars, and three on Venus; these make up the Big Nine. In addition, there are the Minor Commonwealth of Luna, the Planetoids, and the Jovian Satellites. Each commonwealth claims "state's rights",

and, according to the milk-sop constitution of the Solar Government, each Commonwealth has the right to go to hell in its own way. The resulting mess of inter-Commonwealth legislation is more than any court can deal with.

On Earth, for instance, the so-called Commonwealth of the West consists of the United States of America, the Dominion of Canada, the Estado Unidos Mexicanos, the Carribean Confederacy, and the United Nations of Europe. Each one of these is split up into various "sovereign states", which are split up again into districts, counties, duchies, sub-states, provinces, townships, and what-have-you, each maintaining its own claim to some kind of more-or-less autonomy.

With that kind of confusion, any company with the tight organization that *MercUn* has can get away with murder. And we do.

But the only way we can operate is by having an unbroken record of keeping our word, a reputation of giving every client a fair deal and sticking by our guns.

Ch'ien knew we were trustworthy, and Corwin's remark about the client living up to his end of the deal was simply conversation, nothing more.

"Of course," said Ch'ien Tsung George complacently. "Any compact must be mutually agreeable and mutually enforceable. I hope my own feeble efforts will be to your liking."

"So do I," said Corwin. "What are your terms?"

The fat man folded his hands over his paunch and looked up at the ceiling. "I want to know what information New Boston has about the location of the—shall we call it the 'True Heart'? I think that's rather romantic, eh?"

"I will give you—that is to say, I will give *Mercenaries Unlimited*,—all the information I have as to the location of the True Heart. You, on the other hand, will find out what in-



formation New Boston has. Naturally, since you are working for me, you will not disclose any information which I may have to New Boston.

"After finding what the New Boston information is, you will report to me. I will correlate the information, if you have not already done so. I imagine my own efforts will be superfluous, but I want the satisfaction, nonetheless.

"Then one of your agents will obtain the gem and bring it to me.

"As for my part of it." He paused. "I will pay one million credits for the investigation, regardless of the results. If the search is successful, and the stone is actually found, then it will become my property until my death, after which time it will become the property of *Mercenaries Unlimited*."

He smiled at Corwin. "I would, of course, insist on a contract which would provide that your firm would not only refrain from taking steps to hasten my demise, but would do everything in its power to protect me. I think the actual value of the True Heart would make such a contract worth your while."

Corwin was still thinking it over when the 3D tank blanked out. Colonel Battersea had reached over to the control panel on my desk and cut the switch.

"That's the essence of it," the Colonel said. "What do you think of it?"

"We agreed to the contract?" I asked. "As he stated it?"

"With only minor changes, yes," he said.

"Then I don't see anything wrong with it," I told him. "A cool million, whether we succeed or not, plus ultimate possession of the stone if we do find it. The thing must be worth—hell, four or five million."

"All of that," Colonel Battersea agreed. "Corwin agreed with you. That's why we signed the contract. Now we're committed."

I sighed. "All right, then; what's the catch?"

"The catch," said Colonel Battersea, "is that our fat friend is no more interested in that Martian jewel—as a *jewel*—than he is interested in a set of matched kidney-stones. He's pretty well convinced that it's a machine of some kind—and operational device."

I frowned. "I dig you the least. Sketch me a diagram."

"You know something about solid-state physics, surely," he said. "You know how the lattice arrangement of a crystal can be made to function as a machine. Hell, we've been using germanium and silicon crystals as electronic components since before I was born. Transistors are old hat."

I agreed. "So?"

"So, according to our information, the True Heart of Xanthus, as our Hawaiian client called it, has a special crystal lattice that enables it to function as a detector and amplifier. It may be pretty to look at, but it's a hell of a lot more useful than it is pretty, if you follow me."

I did. "But why lay out a million credits to get a better broadcasting crystal? Or is this something that will give us interstellar communication?"

I meant it as a gag, but the colonel took me seriously. "It might be," he said. "According to the legends handed down to the present-day sub-human Martians, that rock is supposed to enable a man to read minds."

I must have showed what I thought on my face. Colonel Battersea looked at me and gave me a wry grin.

"That's right," he said. "Our little True Heart is supposed to be able to make any human being a telepath. And we have an iron-bound contract to get it for Ch'ien Tsung George. And I'm dumping the whole bloody mess in your lap, son. The Legal Department is inclined to think that the stone doesn't even exist; they seem inclined to put it in the same class with King Arthur's Excalibur, the

Philosopher's Stone, and the Holy Grail. They figure us to make a clean million and that's the end of it."

"But you don't agree."

He gave his little shrug. "I wouldn't give big odds against it. Nothing definite, you understand; just a hunch. But let's tackle the job as if the rock really does exist."

"In that case," I said, "our primary investigation will concern Mister Ch'ien Tsung George."

The colonel grinned happily. "I knew you were the man for this job, son. Obviously we dig into Fat Boy first. He knows something that he's not telling us."

So we, as the colonel put it, dug into Fat Boy first.

We had plenty on him to begin with, of course. A man doesn't become a multimillionaire in these days unless he has his fingers in more than one mud pie, and if Ch'ien Tsung George had tried to make the metaphor literally true, he would have had to have more fingers than he had hairs on his head and chin combined, with each one of them stuck into a very dirty pie, indeed. Interplanetary crime covers, if you will pardon the remark, a multitude of sins, and Mr. Ch'ien was involved in most of them.

But we already knew all that. What we wanted to know was how, where, and through whom Ch'ien had gotten his information about the Heart of Xanthus.

While one group of operatives were trying to get the information that Ch'ien wanted from the scientists at New Boston, another group was finding out about Ch'ien's own personal contacts.

The investigation of Ch'ien finally narrowed our sights down to bear on a man named Patterson—Leslie Patterson. We went to our data files to see what we had on him and came up with large fistfuls of very interesting information.

Patterson wasn't the big operator that Ch'ien was, but he was no small-

timer, either. Up until a year or so before, he had been working with the Chinaman hand in glove. During that time, he had personally made three trips to Mars, centering his interest in and around New Boston.

Our agents in New Boston found that Patterson hadn't shown up there under his own name, but that a small, wiry man named Dr. Theodore Reiner had been hobnobbing with certain members of the New Boston Academy of Sciences, concentrating mainly on friendships with archeologists, xenologists, and linguists. The description of "Dr. Reiner" tallied almost perfectly with that of Patterson.

Patterson himself was no slouch when it came to those fields. He had two Ph.D.'s from good Earth universities, and had been a member of the British Royal Society until he was relieved of his fellowship for "conduct unbecoming a Gentleman and Fellow of the Society"—i.e., pocketing funds that rightfully belonged to the Royal Society itself.

Whatever information he'd come up with in New Boston had evidently been shared with Ch'ien Tsung George. But, since then, Patterson and Ch'ien had had a falling out, although not exactly a parting of the ways. They were still crossing each other's trail now and then. It looked as though they were both trying to get the True Heart before the other got it, which made for complications.

That, of course, explained why Ch'ien had come to *Mercenaries Unlimited*. He was so desperately anxious to get that stone before Patterson did that he had stooped to hiring us instead of using his own boys.

In the long run, it didn't matter which of them got the True Heart. If either of them ever got full telepathic powers, as the stone was supposed to give them, then the rest of the human race could kiss their freedom goodbye. Either one of them would rule the Solar System within a year after he got that stone.

And yet, *Mercenaries Unlimited* was honor-bound to find the True Heart and deliver it to Ch'ien. And *MercUn* doesn't renege on a contract.

Another thing we found out was that Ch'ien had most certainly been holding out on us. Not only did he know that the True Heart of Xanthus was more than a simple jewel, but he knew how to use it, once he got hold of it. So, presumably, did Leslie Patterson. Which was a hell of a note all the way around.

Meanwhile, we were earning our million credits from the honorable Mr. Ch'ien Tsung George. He had, true to his word, given us all the information he had about the location of the True Heart. By the time six weeks had passed, our men in New Boston had probed far enough to get the complementary information from the Academy men there. And I, as head of that particular detail got all the reports, so, one fine day, there it all was, staring me smack dab in the face.

I knew where the True Heart of Xanthus was located—if it existed.

Right in the great, sand center of the Xanthus Desert itself.

Where else?

From then on, it was simply a matter of timing. *MercUn* would not, could not, and did not betray a client. I sent Ch'ien a report, as agreed, in a pre-arranged code, giving him, as he had put it, the other half of the treasure map. I also told him that we were sending an agent to Mars to get the stone. By the time the message reached him, I was aboard a high-gee plasma-squirter, hightailing it for Mars at five gravities of acceleration, in one of the best spaceships *MercUn* owned.

It was miserable all the way. I was loaded to the earlobes with antigrav shots, and I was strapped down in a pressure tank to equalize the gravity load, but, even so, I felt the pull. When a man's effective weight is half a ton, he doesn't exactly feel like do-

ing a toe dance.

The only relief I got was a minute or so at turnover, but then it was back to the same old load. By the time my pilot settled the ship down at the New Boston spaceport, I felt about nine hundred years old.

The light Martian gravity made me feel as if I'd crossed a thousand miles of desert on foot and then suddenly fallen into a well of cool water.

At New Boston, I went to a Drive-Yourself place and rented an aircar. I didn't have to pick it out for myself; the manager was one of our men, and he had already been instructed to give me a special job.

Half an hour later, I was cruising over the Xanthus Desert, toward one of the ancient Martian cities. I just moseyed along at two hundred miles an hour, as though I had all the time in the world. Theoretically, I was just out to pick up a hunk of diamond crystal weighing a little more than a pound—Earth weight. I wasn't supposed to have any reason to suspect anything. Around me, there was nothing but the purple Martian sky. All was sweetness and innocence.

The little, ultra-powerful detector in the dashboard told me differently. There was an aircar behind me. I hoped that there was one waiting for me, too.

The one behind me would be Patterson's boys and Patterson himself. Patterson had found out that Ch'ien had come to *MercUn* for help, and had been waiting at New Boston for weeks for me to show up. Now he was tailing me to the hiding place of the True Heart.

Ch'ien should already be at the ruined city. He was supposed to be on Earth, but he'd left three weeks before and was simply waiting for me to tell him where the jewel was. He didn't trust *MercUn*, in spite of what he'd said. He wanted to be there to pick up the jewel when I did.

As I neared the city, Patterson's aircar started closing in on me. I

checked the detector and saw that Ch'ien's aircar was in the city below, well hidden somewhere.

I landed at the outskirts of the city and climbed out as though I had all the time in the world. Then Patterson's aircar screamed down out of the sky and I looked up as though I were surprised. Then I started running for the city's streets. Patterson's car landed and his boys piled out of it, running after me. But I had two hundred yards head start, and I managed to get lost for nearly ten minutes before they spotted me again. They were all carrying person-to-person communicators, so as soon as they saw me again, they gathered together like flies at a watermelon feast. The thing was, they didn't know what I had been up to during that ten minutes.

We weren't alone. Ch'ien and his men were trying to get to me, too, and, what with all the chasing, things were quite jolly for a while. That was when I nearly got myself trapped on the roof.

I kept running after I jumped off the roof, covering as much distance as I could, using the long, leaping strides that Martian gravity makes possible. When I finally reached the edge of the city, I stopped and turned to look back at the scene of the battle. There were a couple of flares of bluish light from meson gun discharges, so I knew that there were still a couple of the boys in the battle.

But I didn't take more than a couple of seconds to check. I had work to do. Beyond the city, on all sides, stretched the flat, arid wastes of the Xanthus Desert. I was now almost directly across the city from where I had landed my aircar. I took the little control unit out of my jacket. The thin, cold night air seemed to cut in like a knife during the time I had my jacket open.

I activated the control unit and began turning the dials.

I imagine that those of Patterson's boys who were watching my car and

guarding their own must have been pretty surprised when it suddenly shot up from the ground and did a fast spin before it gained altitude and looped over the city to where I was waiting for it.

When it landed, I opened the door with a quick jerk, ready for anything. Sure enough, there had been a man in it, but the takeoff and spin had slammed him against the inside walls, and he was out colder than the poles of Pluto. I dumped him out and left him on the sand. I hadn't any time to waste.

I got into the air again and started using some of the hidden resources of the special aircar. First, I gunned it back to Patterson's aircar and gave his machine a blast with the high-amplitude Meson gun concealed in the nose of my own craft. Then I flew into the city, keeping low, and keeping my eyes on the detector plate. Ch'ien's aircar was hidden underneath an overhanging roof near one of the ruined buildings, but I got in close and let it have a blast, too. Then I got up high and zoomed back towards New Boston at a full twelve hundred miles an hour.

Before dawn, I was back aboard the spaceship, ready for the bone-crushing flight back.

Colonel Battersea stepped into my office and let the door close gently behind him. He wore a pleased smile on his face, which pleased me, too.

"I hear all went well," he said. "Want to see the loot?" He didn't wait for an answer; he simply pulled the thing out of his jacket pocket.

It was beautiful. A big diamond, as large as my two fists and weighing over a pound. A perfect octohedron, with edges as sharp as broken glass and as straight as a razor's. But, unlike any diamond I had ever seen before, this one glittered inside with a myriad of little blue-white sparks that seemed to be always on the move.

"So that's the True Heart of Xan-

thus," I said. I could hardly take my eyes off it.

"That's it," said the colonel. "If it really works as a telepathic amplifier, the Company will have a new tool to work with—and a very useful one. How did your end of it come out?"

I told him what had happened out on the Martian desert, and he grinned.

"No trouble at all, eh?" he said.

"Not much. Hell, I could have gotten the stone myself and got away with it."

He shook his head. "It was much better to send in one of our agents from Dullesgrad, on Mars, as soon as you found out where the thing was. That eliminated any chance of losing it to Ch'ien or Patterson. It was gone before they got there."

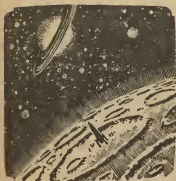
"Have we lived up to the letter of

our contract?" I asked.

"Absolutely," said Colonel Battersea. "We promised to deliver the stone to Ch'ien, here on Earth, as soon as we got it. Despite attacks from—er—unknown assailants, we have brought the stone back. Unfortunately, our client has failed us. He hasn't shown up to pay us the million he owes us, and, for some reason, he can't be found anywhere on Earth. But when he does show up to get his property, we'll give it to him—if he pays the million."

I nodded, grinning. With no means of transportation; with no food, and no water; with only the air in the air tanks on their backs, Ch'ien, Patterson, and Company would be a long, long time covering the five thousand miles across the Xanthus Desert to the nearest human city. Hell, they might never make it.

## Further Details on the Russian Moon Rocket



*At the exact moment* when the rocket reached the far side of the Moon's surface, and precisely on a straight line joining Moon-Station-Sun, it sent a signal to Earth. Scientists immediately sent back a radio "command" signal. When it was received...

—Electronic "eyes," gyroscopes, computers, and engines of undisclosed design *stopped* the Station from spinning in space, so camera could be brought into action.

—Then a sun-watching "eye" made engines turn the entire rocket and hold it so camera pointed straight at Moon.

—A signal was shot to Earth, and scientists who heard it gave their command to start the camera working.

The rocket had 40 minutes to carry out its historic task of photographing the eternally hidden face of our Moon. How they did it reads like fiction...

First, a motor opened a port-hole cover over the two lenses of the rocket's camera.

Electronic "exposure meter" then "read" the brightness and contrast of the Moon, constantly changing camera lens openings (diaphragms) as the rocket moved in orbit.

Two lenses (200 and 500 mm focal lengths) took both close-up and distant (complete) photos of the Moon.

Then the 35 mm film began to "take pictures," passing at once into developing apparatus.

# TO MARS AND VENUS IN THE GAY NINETIES

by SAM MOSKOWITZ

DURING that colorful and nostalgic period, which Americans refer to as The Gay Nineties, the scientists and the imaginative writers of the world worked with increased vigor on the problems of space flight and the possibility of life on other worlds. Such colorful personalities as John L. Sullivan ("I can lick any man in the world"), the hefty beauty Lillian Russell and her portly admirer, Diamond Jim Brady promenading through the news diet of the American nation obscured the vast theoretical and literary progress on space flight being made, despite the fact that the first successful air flight was still a number of years away.

Actually it was scientific work that inspired a good deal of the fiction. Particularly astronomers of the calibre of Camille Flammarion, whose books were heavily translated from the French in the 'nineties and Percival Lowell whose famous projections concerning Mars suggested a pattern of conditions on that world which to a greater or lesser degree has pervaded the entire literature on the subject ever since.

As the century neared its end, the time had long passed when the nature of the planets and the stars was an unfathomable mystery. Electricity

had been tamed, experimental internal combustion engines had been built, and the telephone was a common device. The state of scientific knowledge was well advanced. A writer with an inquiring mind would have no difficulty learning the problems of space flight and the theoretical methods of overcoming them.

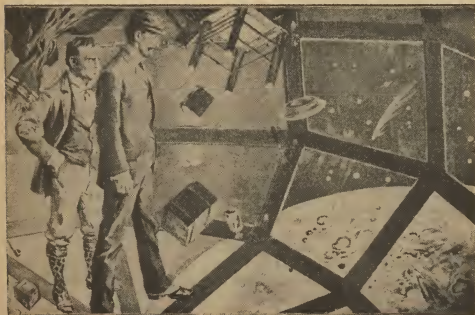
The improved state of scientific progress was to a degree reflected in the space sojourns of that period, rendering careless errors all the more inexcusable. The emphasis now began to shift from lauding a writer or scientist because he was occasionally right to deploring him because he was occasionally wrong.

A popular fiction writer of 1890, Robert Cromie, had published an interplanetary adventure entitled *A Plunge Into Space*. While the motive force of his space vessel was obtained by complete control of gravity through electrical means, several other unique elements were contributed to the methods and plotting of space fiction by this novel. Cromie helped introduce the notion of a completely globular spaceship which later became the vogue after the publication of Edward E. Smith's, *The Skylark of Space* in 1928.

Secondly, Cromie was an early pro-



That interplanetary spaceships would have to carry air flying vehicles for planetary atmospheres was anticipated by Gustavus W. Pope, M.D. in his thrilling 1895 romance *A Journey to Venus*.



The weightlessness of objects in space is illustrated in H. G. Wells' *First Men in the Moon* as the vessel, powered by the antigravity metal *Cavorite*, approaches the moon.

ponent of grim realism in science fiction, pioneering two plot devices which were effectively used by later writers. In the early part of his book he depicted Mars as a desolate, unfriendly world where the explorers are almost defeated by the elements. When, 42 years later, Laurence Manning did the same thing in his short novel *The Wreck of the Asteroid*, which began in the December, 1932 issue of WONDER STORIES, the editor, David Lasser was so struck by the originality of the approach that he said: "Mr. Manning brushes aside all nice fantasies of Mars peopled with golden creatures just ready to bestow blessings on earth explorers. Instead there is a naked world, heartless, relentless."

Another plot twist of Cromie's that anticipated Tom Godwin's, *The Cold Equations*, concerns a Martian girl who stows away on the earth ship because of her love for one of the explorers and then realizes that she must die if the remainder of the crew are to have enough air to make it back to earth.

The many aspects of high originality in *A Plunge Into Space* attracted the attention and admiration of the old master Jules Verne, who sent a letter of appreciation which was run as an introduction to a second edition of the book published in 1891. The second edition contained a number of full-page illustrations which indicate that the book was a commercial success. It was the publishing pattern in England to frequently make second editions far more attractive than the first on the reasonable assumption that good initial sale suggested that the property was worth promoting.

The proposal of a reaction device or rockets for space travel is relatively uncommon in scientific literature or in fiction until after World War II. In Germany, Hermann Ganswindt, an eccentric and combative inventor designed a space ship which was driv-

en by explosives, the blast passing right through a center well. Ganswindt also conceived of the idea of creating artificial gravity in space-flight by rotating the passenger-carrying portion of his ship. Willy Ley established that Ganswindt had presented the idea in a speech as early as 1891. Ganswindt claimed to have conceived it even earlier.

John Jacob Astor is a name that conjures the same association of wealth as Rockefeller or Morgan. His end was tragic as one of those who went down with the ill-fated "unsinkable" Titanic. However, he made a much more remarkable trip in imagination as author of *A Journey in Other Worlds*, published in 1894 and a minor best seller of the period. Astor's characters visited every known planet of the solar system utilizing anti-gravity as a means of propulsion. More honest than many of his contemporaries, Astor adopted the same name for anti-gravity as Percy Greg's *Across the Zodiac*, "Apergy," so little more need be said of the derivation of his ideas.

There was more than a bit of religion and preachment in Astor's book but Gustavus W. Pope, M.D., with *A Journey to Mars* in 1894 and its sequel, *A Journey to Venus* in 1895 concentrated on writing first-rate adventure stories. The anti-gravity "ethervolts" in his crudely drawn illustrations, resemble some of the teardrop shaped flying saucers that have been "photographed" in recent years. There was one element of novelty. Each of the ethervolts towed an airship (with multiple wings) along with it to be used in the atmosphere of the planets. Pope recognized that a true space ship might not be suitable for rambling about the atmosphere.

The British writer Thomas Dixon, in his 1895 volume *1500 Miles an Hour*, enjoys the distinction of being the earliest science fiction novelist to make arrangements to repair his





Moonmen make no move to stop visiting earthman as he radios his strange tale to receivers on his home planet, in H. G. Wells' *First Men in the Moon*.

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Vol. V

### The Chase of a Comet;

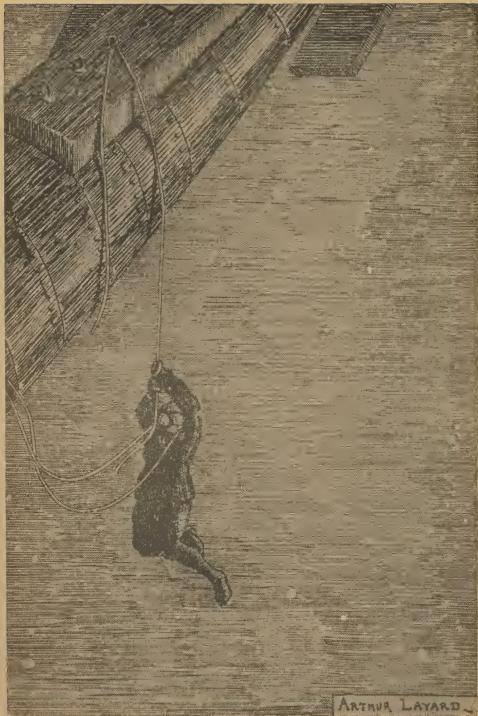
or, Frank Reade, Jr.'s Most Wonderful  
Aerial Trip With His New Air-  
Ship the "Flash."

By "NONAME."



From the edge they had reached their ship's, following the machine, and were already prepared to take a  
flight at the comet's tail. "Merry on us!" quipped Frank. "It looks like an airship."

The dauntless vessel darting into the tail of the comet is piloted by the brilliant young inventor Frank Reade, Jr.



The problem of repairing a space ship in the void was carefully considered by British writer Thomas Dixon in *1500 Miles an Hour* published in 1895. He forgot that there is no gravity in space to cause the man to hang down from the rope!

space ship from the outside while in space. He thoughtfully provided modified diver's suits and the artist illustrated the scene. He also condenses air from the "ether," brings along food concentrates and propels his ship with electricity produced from petroleum. It is never quite clear whether this is antigravity or not.

The greatest of all science fiction dime novelists was Luis Senarens, who, under the pen name of "No-name" wrote the novels in THE FRANK READE LIBRARY. His lead character, Frank Reade, Jr., each week created a new invention to go adventuring with. For the issue of May 31, 1895, Frank Reade, Jr. builds a super air ship, oxygen equipped, airtight and electrically heated, with which he attempts to get a close-up of Hopkin's Comet in *The Chase of The Comet*. He actually sees volcanoes and mountains on the comet before it crashes in the arctic.

Emboldened, he improves his ship further in *Lost In A Comet's Tail* in the Dec. 13, 1895 novel and gives chase to Verdi's comet. This time he is caught in the comet's tail and pulled beyond the earth's atmosphere. He breaks loose, but his ship is suspended motionless in space above the earth. He has foresightedly brought along suits so they can walk on the deck of the ship. A girl with them, who falls off the ship, merely floats alongside. Another small stray comet breaks the gravitational stalemate and brings them back to earth. With a little more thought, this could have been turned into an early earth-satellite story but Senarens misses the opportunity.

The generally-held concept that science fiction novels before the advent of regular periodicals of that type were isolated and unrelated happenstances is obviously untrue as one finds that through the centuries no author wrote space travel tales in an intellectual vacuum but built upon the ideas suggested by previous writ-

ers. No better example of this fact can be demonstrated than the work of Edwin Pallander in 1896 which borrowed its title, *Across the Zodiac*, from an earlier work by Percy Greg and its plot from *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* by Jules Verne. The popular "antigravity" method is utilized by Pallander and we find the mental anguish of Captain Nemo of Verne's famous work duplicated in space. Where Verne discovers the lost city of Atlantis beneath the seas, Pallander manages to find an underground city on the moon.

The fidelity with which early science fiction writers copied their predecessors is also to be found in *Daybreak* by James Cowan, a novel published in 1896. Suffering from a too-close reading of *Conquest of the Moon* by Andre Laurie, Cowan saves the problem of building a space ship by having the lunar globe come crashing into the Pacific ocean. His characters then float up its surface in a balloon. Visiting Martians give them a further trip to the Red Planet and return.

By contrast, John Munro, in *A Trip to Venus*, published in 1897, is as scientific as Cowan is unscientific. Munro had a good knowledge of science and had written two previous popular scientific books on electricity titled *The Wire and the Wave*, and *The Story of Electricity*. The value of his scientific background is impressively displayed when he suggests in an early part of the story a prototype of the three-stage rocket, the earliest such mention on record. Deploring the scientific weakness of Verne's giant cannon as a means of shooting the ship into space, on the grounds that the initial velocity would be deadly to its occupants, Munro suggested that a large cannon shoot off a complete small cannon with a shell inside, the second cannon firing the shell when its velocity was exhausted, utilizing selenoids.

He further suggested the use of

rockets for propelling a space ship and correctly observed that they would need no atmosphere to push against. He noted that even a bullet shot from an ordinary gun could propel a weightless ship in outer space.

After this magnificent start, the author decides his proposed ideas are too complex and "invents" a nice, simple anti-gravity unit to do the job!

The year 1897 seemed to truly represent a "breakthrough" for imaginative scientific concepts among science fiction writers. In addition to Munro, the German writer Kurd Lasswitz had published that year the novel that established his fame, *On Two Planets*. This story suggested that advanced Martians might conceivably visit the Earth first. To accomplish this, he has them establish an artificial satellite over the Earth's North Pole. Their ships are powered by antigravity, but steered by reaction of a power called "repulsor."

For a period Lasswitz was credited with being the first man to conceive of the idea of an earth satellite until the science fiction world bothered to re-read and trace the origin of *The Brick Moon* by Edward Everett Hale. This short novel, which first appeared as a three-part serial in the *Atlantic Monthly* for Oct., Nov. and Dec. 1869, was so popular that the magazine solicited a sequel, *Life on The Brick Moon*, which ran complete in the Feb., 1870 number. In phenomenal detail, Hale, who had already established an enduring literary reputation as the author of the short story, *Man Without A Country*, describes the reasons for building an earth satellite, its method of construction, and launching, and life aboard it so thoroughly and convincingly as to establish *The Brick Moon* as a prophetic classic. Hale was also responsible for the authorship of several Utopian fantasies and for tracing the origin of the name of the state of California to the Spanish work of science fiction, *Deeds of Esplandian*, pub-

lished in Spain in 1510, portions of which were translated by Hale for publication in *The Atlantic Monthly* during the 1863 under the title of *The Queen of California*. Though nearly 100 years have passed since Hale's discovery, no one has yet come up with an earlier use of California in any book or manuscript.

*Loma, A Citizen of Venus*, which was issued in 1897 by William Windor, LL.B., Ph.D., who was both author and publisher, is a strange volume. The author employs teleportation for interplanetary travel, though his Venusians have anti-gravity. The Venusians have colonized the earth centuries past through sending out spores. The Venusians have their telepathic supermen mingled with the human race. These supermen alter the genetics of women to bring into existence mutated children.

The ideas on sex are greatly advanced for the period, probably due to the fact that the author had written a number of books on that subject as well as on phrenology, which he considered a true science taken over by quacks. His ideas on religion are potent enough to work up a local ban even in this "enlightened" day and age.

While Charles Dixon was on his way to Mars at 1500 miles an hour, Edwin Pallander copying Verne, John Munro inventing the three-stage projectile and Kurd Lasswitz cementing his fame, a new figure had arisen in the world of science fiction writing who would infinitely outdistance them all, both in the quality of his writing and the acclaim of the literati. Already, *The Time Machine*, published in 1895, was admitted a classic and between shudders, both sides of the Atlantic acknowledged the merits of *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, published in 1896, which was followed by the appearance of the popular *Invisible Man* shortly afterward.

Now, this young literary giant, H. G. Wells, probably the greatest scien-

Next Week **WORKING THE ROAD:** Next Week  
Or, Beating His Way to Buffalo.

# HAPPY DAYS

A PAPER FOR YOUNG AND OLD.

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NEW YORK, ALBERT 12, 1891.

## THREE BOYS FROM THE MOON: Or, The Strange Story of Will White.



Science fiction was still being tailored to suit the boys as evidenced by this strange anti gravity ship and donkey-eared Lunarites appearing in the novel *Three Boys from the Moon*.



This 1901 illustration shows the interior of the *Astronef*, as the lead characters of Griffith's *A Honeymoon in Space* observe the earth and drink a toast to the planet after a honeymoon in space.



tific romancer who ever lived, decided to base his 1897 novel *The War of the Worlds* on an interplanetary theme.

The Martians come to the Earth in shells shot from a giant cannon on Mars in the manner of Jules Verne's early classic, *From the Earth to the Moon*. The method of propulsion is the only point of similarity between the two works. Wells suggests, apparently for the first time in the literature, that creatures from other planets might not only be a monstrous species of life, but that they also might be more intelligent than humans and bent on conquest.

The superb writing and characterization of *The War of the Worlds* had almost immediate impact. Two British humorists, C.L. Graves and E.V. Lucas, brought out *The War of the Wenuses* with a dedication page reading, "To H.G. Wells this outrage on a fascinating and convincing romance."

Women from Venus, tired of men on their planet who are all invisible, come to earth in a crinoline ship stiffened with hoops to sample what Earth has to offer. They kill a lot of men who are irresistibly drawn to them, but eventually, the same strait-laced wives who henpeck their husbands, successfully drive off the Wenuses. The author expresses the feeling of the Wenuses at the end: "Wrong? O of course It's heinous,

But we're going, girls, you just bet!  
Do they think that the Wars of  
Venus

Can be stopped by an epithet?  
When the henpecked Earth-men pray  
us

To join them at afternoon tea  
Not rhyme nor reason can stay us  
From Flying to set them free.

When the men on that hapless planet,  
Handsome and kind and true  
Cry out, "Hurry up!" O hang it!

What else can a Wenus do?  
I suppose it was rather bad form,  
girls,

But really we didn't care,  
For our planet was growing too  
warm, girls  
And we wanted a change of air."

A more positive reaction to Wells' epic novel of interplanetary invasion took place in America, where, on Jan. 12, 1898, barely six weeks after *The War of the Worlds* had been serialized in COSMOPOLITAN, THE NEW YORK JOURNAL commenced a sequel written by Garrett P. Serviss and titled *Edison's Conquest of Mars*. Serviss was a lawyer and journalist who decided to devote his life to popularizing astronomy. *Edison's Conquest of Mars* was his first work of fiction, though he later was to establish himself as one of the top writers of science fiction of the earlier part of the century with such efforts as *The Moon Metal*, *A Columbus of Space* and *The Second Deluge*.

While a space fleet is part of *A Journey to Venus* by Gustavus W. Pope, M.D., which appeared in 1895, the classic tableau of a battle of opposing fleets in space seems to be the dramatic contribution of Serviss. Feeling that the Martians are building another fleet to invade earth, Serviss utilizes the aid of the great men of science of the nineties: Edison, Kelvin and Roentgen among them and comes up with a space ship which "short circuits" gravity, though electricity, which he equips with disintegrator rays and space suits to make repairs in space. The space suits contain telephones for communication.

There was no question that the Gay Nineties had been an epochal period for the development of interplanetary literature; a decade in which it had come into its own both as scientific prophecy and as literature.

From this transition was to grow the space tales of the 20th Century and one of the earliest practitioners of prominence was George Griffith, who had attained best-selling rank with his tales of warfare in the near



future, *The Angel of the Revolution* and *Olga Romanoff*. In the latter, which appeared in 1894, communication with Mars was established as an important premise of the story. The turn of the century found him visiting that planet and many others in a series of episodes titled *Stories of Other Worlds* which ran serially in PEARSON'S magazine for 1900. The following year they were collected into a single volume under the title of *A Honey Moon in Space*. The book is not distinguished for its "R" Force theory "that every positive force has a negative reaction and therefore we may negate gravity", but for the sophistication with which it treated a space tour, including a marriage and honeymoon in space. It is also realistic in its descriptions of weightlessness in space and the problems of adjustment to that condition. A great deal of the ideas contained are based on the writings of Camille Flammarion, but they are presented in a highly romanticized manner which accounts for the novel's initial appeal.

That the literature of space would retain its popularity among the nation's youth during the coming century was foreshadowed by the appearance of *Three Boys From the Moon; Or, the Strange Story of Will White*, which ran in three weekly installments in the boys' magazine HAPPY DAYS, beginning with the Aug. 17, 1901 number. This story, credited to Gaston Garne, may well be the work of Luis P. Senarens, author of the Frank Reade series. The circumstantial evidence pointing to this conclusion is as follows: Senarens' daughter claims that he wrote a moon story which was not in the Frank Reade series and which appeared after the turn of the century. She is sure of this, because as a little girl she helped him do research on the story.

Senarens did almost all of his work for Frank Tousey and HAPPY DAYS was a Frank Tousey publication. Several other stories of fantastic

adventure appear under the name of Gaston Garne in the same paper. The clincher is that practically no other Moon stories appear in other dime novels during this period.

For the above reason and as a link in the chain of teen-age interest in space travel, the work is noted though its "vit," a metal which draws and "kit," a metal which repels when powered by moon current, "stitt," is of too obvious and comfortable a genesis to deserve elaboration.

Now, already a literary great, H.G. Wells produced in 1901 his interplanetary triumph, *The First Men in the Moon*, containing some of the most brilliant descriptions of the lunar scene ever penned. An imaginative genius, Wells' excursion was founded in a long and fascinated reading of other works of science fiction which dated from Lucien's *Icaromenippus*, from which tale he quoted: "Three thousand stadia from the earth to the moon... Marvel not, my comrade, if I appear talking to you on the superterrestrial and aerial topics. The long and the short of the matter is that I am running over the order of a Journey I have lately made."

In discussing means of building his space sphere, one of Wells' characters refers to "Jules Verne's apparatus in *A Trip to the Moon*" confirming Wells' reading of that author. The idea for the motive power is obviously derived from *A Voyage to the Moon*, by Crysostum Trueman.

There would, therefore, be anti-gravity with elaborate screens to control their intensity, but beyond that there would be sound, logical reasoning for even the more far-fetched scientific concepts, colorful scientific romance enduring wonder, scouring social criticism and unsurpassed literary skill.

The Gay Nineties were over and a new era in fictional space travel had begun.

# THE MYSTERY OF THE MARTIAN SATELLITES

by  
Dr. I. S. SHKLOVSKY

THE OPINION of the Soviet scientists is a mixed one. Academician L.I. Sedov, Corresponding Member of the USSR Academy of Sciences V.L. Ginzburg, Professors V.I. Krasovsky, A.I. Lebedev, K.P. Stanyukovich and others have taken a sympathetic view of my hypothesis. On the other hand there are some Soviet scientists, notably Academician V.G. Fesenkov, who are skeptical about it. They have advanced a number of objections which seem to me to be groundless.

The American scientists have received the article in your newspaper as a belated April Fools' Day joke. As Gerard P. Kuiper, well-known American astronomer and Head of the Department of Astronomy at the University of Chicago, has said, "Shklovsky may have said all this so as to see what the newspapers would do with it.... He cannot seriously believe in such nonsense." Doctor Slyfer, a prominent astronomer, has been even more outspoken by calling my hypothesis "science fiction nonsense."

I guess the explanation for such decided, though not well-reasoned opinions, lies in the fact that the people who hold them have learned about my hypothesis from more or less free translations of the *Komsomolskaya Pravda* article without taking the trouble of pondering over my arguments. It is quite possible that American scientists are accustomed to jokes on the pages of reputable newspapers. Besides, it may be added that before giving such a categorical answer to a hypothesis, one should read it in a scientific presentation rather than

Recently the *Komsomolskaya Pravda* carried an interview with I. S. Shklovsky (Ph. D. in Physics and Mathematics), on his hypothesis of the origin of the Martian satellites. Using some abnormalities in the movement of one of the two Martian satellites as a starting point, the Soviet scientist had suggested they were of artificial origin. In another meeting with the scientist a *Komsomolskaya Pravda* correspondent asked Shklovsky to tell of the response his hypothesis has evoked among world scientists. The above is the statement, translated from the Russian.

base one's opinion on a newspaper article.

My scientific arguments are based, among other things, on the observations by American scientists of the acceleration of Phobos. In my broadcast for American listeners early last May, in which I argued with Dr. Kuiper, I said in particular that should the further observations which had not yet been published nor known to me show the Phobos was not accelerating, I should certainly abandon the hypothesis. If there are no such reports, the objections must be swept away as groundless.

The question whether Mars' satellites were artificial was attracting the attention of world opinion all during May. Some American astronomers had to admit that my arguments were correct. To cite one example, a spokesman of the Naval Observatory, the largest in the United States, said: "Shklovsky has absolutely correctly computed that if this (Phobos' acceleration) is true, the Martian moon should be hollow, as it cannot both have the weight of a natural body and behave as it has been described." Professor Singer, a prominent American scientist, said that "if the figures

Shklovsky has used are correct, his conclusions are irrefutable. If Phobos accelerates its motion, as has been reported, this moon must be a hollow shell the 'skin' of which is not more than 8 inches thick, while its diameter is 10 miles."

It will be seen that the stand taken by the American scientists recently differs radically from what it was originally, and there is no trace left of an ironic attitude toward my hypothesis.

On the other hand, Gerald M. Clemence, a well-known American scientist, a few days ago said that George Wilkins of Greenwich Observatory had questioned the validity of the data on the acceleration of Phobos. Wilkins had not yet published his studies, but was going to, Clemence said.

We shall wait for the studies by Wilkins or anybody else to be published. If it is true that Phobos does not accelerate, there will be no strictly scientific argument to substantiate the artificial origin of the Martian satellites, and the question of their origin will remain open—though it is quite possible even in that case that they are of artificial origin.

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## AN EDITORIAL ASIDE —

Fred Brown should need no introduction to science fiction readers and I will attempt none. I will simply say this that I have been searching for a possible serial for *Fantastic Universe* since both *FU* and *The Saint Mystery Magazine* were taken over by GAP. I feel I have found this serial, with the warmly human qualities in it that distinguishes the writing of Fredric Brown—a quality which I believe you will respond to. **THE MIND THING**, which begins next month, is *not* "space opera"—that will come later this Summer. It is the story of an alien mind's ventures among us and our reactions to it. I think you will agree with me—once you are finished with **THE MIND THING**—that this is Fredric Brown's most distinguished novel in this field.



by RANDALL GARRETT

# **DRUG ON THE MARKET**

GIVING credit where credit is due is, in most cases, a fine thing, but giving any credit to Leland Hale for ever having done a great and noble deed is, I submit, stretching things so far that words lose their meaning.

Motive is all-important in judging a thing like this, and Leland Hale's motives were never even vaguely pure or altruistic. Now, I'll admit that many a so-called philanthropist has endowed a hospital or a library for the purely selfish reason of wanting to go down in history as a philanthropist, and I'll admit that, even so, they should be given credit for having done something fine.

But if Leland Hale had ever endowed a hospital, it would have been for the purpose of making back a high multiple of the money invested within as short a time as possible. Any good he did for humanity was purely a by-product of the often intricate machinations he went through to further his own selfish ends.

As I have pointed out before, folk

legend has a terribly human tendency to make heroes out of even the vilest of villains, provided they are colorful enough in their actions and are not guilty of vileness just for the sake of vileness. A man may kill and rob and swindle with impunity, insofar as legend is concerned, provided he does it with dash and cleverness, and doesn't show any more cowardice than necessary. But the hero-worshipper wants no bluebeard or Giles de Rais, who butchers the helpless apparently for the sheer love of butchery, and he wants no colorless sneak-thief.

Leland Hale was neither. He neither enjoyed killing nor avoided it. He killed only when, to his way of thinking, it was necessary, although the accidental death of innocent bystanders was no concern of his. And although he could be as sneaky a sneak-thief as any, he could also be bold, and he was never colorless.

In these days of modern psychom-

etry, it is possible to dig out the motivations behind a man's actions, provided enough of those actions are known. Granted, our knowledge of the actions of Leland Hale, after a century has passed, are necessarily incomplete. The passage of time has dimmed some of the data, some have been distorted by legend, and some are simply non-existent. Hale, after all, was understandably secretive about the majority of his activities.

But, so far as we can tell, the man had no grudge against the Galaxy as a whole; he was not psychotic or more than normally neurotic; he was not warped by horribly traumatic experiences during childhood; he did not have any so-called "fixations" or "complexes" or what have you; he was not forced or driven to do what he did or be what he was. He did it because he damned well wanted to, because he enjoyed it.

Too many hero-worshipping pseudo-biographers have tried to excuse Leland Hale on the grounds that "he couldn't help some of the things he did because of his environment", but this theory holds no more water than the surface of Vega I. Granted, Hale, like anyone else, was forced by circumstances to do certain things, but very few of those acts were the ones which his apologists try to excuse for him.

It would be hard, for instance, for anyone with any respect for truth to explain away or soften the incident on Giffer.

The Galaxy is big, and, as far as the Interstellar Police of a century ago were concerned, too damned big. With five billion major wanted criminals moving about the Galaxy at any one time, plus sixty or seventy billion stay-at-homes, finding or tracking one man was not an easy job by a long shot. Even a normally intelligent criminal had a pretty good chance of eluding capture for

years, and with a man like Leland Hale, the odds against nabbing him were even higher.

The Planetary Police of Giffer (Kamis IV on the stellographic charts) were no slouches when it came to police work; their technological level was behind that of the main stream of the Galaxy, but they had reached Level 5, about that of Earth in the late 20th or early 21st Century, Old Style, and they did exceptionally well in policing their planet, only rarely needing help from the IP, and even more rarely asking for it.

But they couldn't possibly keep tabs on every crook in the known Universe, so it should not be considered surprising that they did not immediately leap from their swivel chairs when, as a matter of routine, they received the passenger list on the luxury liner *Bencolin* when it docked at the major spaceport of the planet on what was, in that hemisphere, a fine summer day.

The list was duly noted and filed, of course, but none of the officers that handled it took a second glance at the name of A. L. DeHallen, about midway through it, and many of them didn't even take a first glance. And, after all, why should they?

Mr. DeHallen himself was a portly man, so wide of shoulder that he looked squat, in spite of his six feet six. His hair was white, and his face seamed with smile-wrinkles that gave him a harmless, almost benign appearance. He strolled down the walkway from the ship as though he had absolutely nothing on his conscience, and, if the truth were known, he probably didn't.

He checked his luggage through customs, giving everyone an affable smile, and then took a twenty-minute skyride to one of the best hotels in Greatport City.

He checked in, went to his room, and dialed for the City Directory. He watched the listings move across the screen on the visiphone as he held

down the *scan* button. When the listings came to the W's, he eased up. When it reached the name he was looking for, he stopped the scan and looked at the number.

Then he blanked out the directory and dialed the number.

A pretty, smiling, blonde girl appeared. "Worldwide Pharmaceuticals, good afternoon," she said, with businesslike pleasantness.

The elderly-looking gentleman was all smiles. "Good afternoon. My name is DeHallen; A. L. DeHallen. I wish to speak to your Mr. Vekkor. He will recognize my name."

The girl smiled politely. "Yes, sir. We've been waiting for you to contact us since the *Bencolin* landed. I'll put you through to Mr. Vekkor right away."

The girl's face vanished, to be replaced by the face of a man. He was middle-aged, graying, joweled, and saggy-faced, as though he had once been a hundred pounds overweight, but had recently pared off sixty pounds of the excess. His mouth, however, had a firm, businesslike set to it, and his eyes were a cold gray.

The businesslike mouth achieved a businesslike smile.

"Ah, Mr. DeHallen! I trust you had a good trip."

Those who are familiar with the chronicles of Leland Hale are well aware of Hale's delight in anagrammatical aliases, and even the newcomer has seen through "A. L. DeHallen" by this time, so we can dispense with further mummery and refer to Leland Hale by his right name.

Leland Hale smiled pleasantly and nodded. "An excellent trip, thank you, Mr. Vekkor. I am most happy to make your acquaintance."

"And I yours," said Vekkor. "I trust everything is in—ah—order?"

"Oh, yes. Yes, indeed. I have the—"

Vekkor held up his hand hastily. "Please!" he said sharply. Then,

looking rather apologetic, "Speaking over a public circuit is hardly the place for discussing private business." The sentence was somewhat tangled, but Hale nodded.

"I understand that things are somewhat different on Giffer," he said. "But you must remember that this is my first trip here." That was a flat lie. Leland Hale had thoroughly cased the planet Giffer for months before he took action.

"Do you have the *sample* with you?" Vekkor asked guardedly. His slight emphasis on the noun proclaimed it a circumlocution.

"That is why I called you," Leland Hale informed him pleasantly. "I have deposited it at the Customs office. I cannot import it without your guarantee that it is to be used for research purposes."

Vekkor raised an eyebrow. "I should think that so small an amount—" Then he stopped, as though he didn't care to continue with the obvious.

Leland Hale looked properly shocked. "I hope you are not suggesting, Mr. Vekkor, that I should attempt to smuggle five kilogram through Customs. In the first place, it would be unethical; in the second, impossible."

Vekkor's eyes bugged. His jaw hung vacuously for a moment, then snapped closed. He swallowed with effort. "Five kilogram?" he said. Then he pulled himself together. "I see. Very well. I shall contact Customs immediately. It would probably be best if I met you there; we will both have to sign certain papers. The usual red tape, you know."

Leland Hale nodded, smiling. "Certainly. Of course. Whenever it is convenient for you."

"I'll have to make a few calls," said Vekkor. "I'll call you back in an hour and let you know."

"Excellent," said Hale. "That will

give me time to freshen up and eat lunch."

Vekkor said, "Fine," and broke the circuit.

In these days, if anyone in the civilized Galaxy is a dynodine addict, it's because he hasn't had more than two or three doses of the stuff. After that, if he's got any sense, he goes to a hospital for treatment; if he doesn't have any sense, somebody will take him to the hospital by force.

Not so, a century ago. Today, dynodine is given for several neurological ills, because the antidote, made from the drug itself, is, like dynodine, cheap and plentiful. A hundred years ago, dynodine was one of the most expensive substances in the known universe, and the antidote was even more so.

Originally, dynodine was produced from a plant, or rather, a plant-animal, a unicellular thing that grows in the seas of Venturis V. Each of the little things has only a relatively few molecules of the drug in it, so it takes literally tons of the one-celled plant-animals to get a gram of dynodine. Since the micro-organism involved will grow only in the seas of Venturis V, it is easy to see that before it was synthesized the drug commanded fantastically high prices.

If it had not been for the side effects, dynodine would have been used only as a medicine, and there would have been no trouble with it. But it did have side effects—lovely ones. And, naturally, the stuff quickly became a marketable substance for the underworld of half a hundred planets. Traffic in the drug was rigorously controlled, but since a single microgram is an effective dose, it was difficult for any search, no matter how thorough, to keep every bit of it off any planet.

For anyone to be blithely toting around five kilogram of the stuff was not only highly suspicious, but

almost unheard of. To say that it took adroit and convincing talking to get the package through customs is to understate the problem. For a while, it looked as though only an act of the Planetary Assembly would do the trick. But Leland Hale's elocution carried such conviction that he could, figuratively, talk himself out of a locked bank vault, and it is not to be expected that the persuasive powers of A. L. DeHallen were any poorer.

At any rate, by sunset the five thousand grams of dynodine which DeHallen had brought to Giffer was safely ensconced in the vaults of the Worldwide Pharmaceutical Company of Greatport City, Giffer, and, after a very tasty and highly successful business dinner with Mr. Jaym Vekkor, Mr. A. L. DeHallen took his leave and toddled off to bed.

DeHallen went to bed, but Leland Hale did not. The plexiskin mask that made DeHallen the kindly-looking soul that he seemed was carefully peeled off, and from beneath it emerged the hard, handsome features of Leland Hale. The white surface-dye came out of Hale's hair, leaving it a dark brown, and a simple change in posture removed the droopy shoulders and the sagging belly that had belonged to DeHallen. Leland Hale was himself again.

He had work to do.

The Hotel Grandview was what was known in those days as a "tight-security" hotel. Each floor on each wing was presided over—guarded—by a security officer who made sure that no one went in or out without authorization. Between the front door of the lobby and the door of his room, a guest had to pass half a dozen alert men who had their eyes open for everything. It was the boast of the Hotel Grandview that no guest had ever been robbed or murdered on their premises. That was not



strictly true, but it is true that the culprit had been nabbed within minutes after the commission of the few crimes that did occur.

In view of this, it is noteworthy that every one of the security men were willing to take their solemn oath that Mr. A. L. DeHallen had retired at exactly 2130 hours on the evening in question, and had not been seen again until 0800 hours the next morning. Neither did they see any strangers in the hotel. All was as it should be.

In these days of phototraps and electroshotters, it is difficult to understand how anyone could ever make use of an invisibility suit. Any criminal foolish enough to wear one would be spotted before he walked a dozen paces on any civilized planet of the Galaxy. But we must keep it in mind that at that time, the invisibility suit was a closely guarded secret of the Interstellar Police; most people did not even know they existed, and thus had no need for any defenses against them.

Leland Hale, then, strolled blithely out of the hotel right past the unseeing eyes of seven security officers and thrice again as many hotel guests.

Anyone who has ever worn an invisibility suit knows that strolling blithely in one is a difficult feat indeed for the amateur. Like a disembodied spirit, you seemingly float above the ground without legs, arms, or body, and, lacking the sense of sight to guide those members, it takes practice before you can know where they are to within a fraction of an inch by feel alone. Stairways, especially, are difficult to maneuver around on, and tumbling head over haunches down a staircase tends to destroy any illusion that there is no one on the stairs.

But Leland Hale strolled along blithely, wearing a regulation suit formerly belonging to the Special

Services Division of the Interstellar Police, a suit which the IP thought had been destroyed in an explosion on Argolix.

There are many drawbacks to wearing an invisibility suit, and one of them is transportation difficulties. Hailing an aircab is obviously impossible, and getting aboard a tubeway leaves one open to the possibility of being jostled by a fellow traveler, which is disconcerting to everybody involved. Walking along a crowded thoroughfare has its drawbacks, too, but Leland Hale had decided that it was the only method, so he walked.

An hour later, having avoided all difficulties thus far, he found himself in one of the residential districts of Greatport City. Walking down the streets in this part of town was like walking down a roofless corridor; here were the walled acres of the wealthy, all carefully guarded, and bugged to a fare-the-well. Leland Hale was fairly sure he could get into any one of them, but there was no need of betraying that fact just yet.

So far, no one on Giffer had seen his face, which was just the way he wanted it. But now he was ready to show that face—to one man who would appreciate it.

The street was well lighted, so what he had to do would require precise timing if he didn't want to be seen suddenly appearing out of nowhere by a passer-by when he cut off the power of his invisibility suit. The entrance to the particular estate he wanted was half a block away, just around the next corner. He went to the corner, and waiting until just the right moment, he switched off the suit just as he turned the corner. To anyone watching, it was as if he had simply walked around the corner of the twenty-foot wall. He went on walking, just as nonchalantly as if he had business there—which, as a matter of cold fact, he had.

The suit now looked like an ordinary one-piece suit, except for the hood and gloves, which were so transparent as to be almost invisible. With an idle gesture, as though he were scratching his head in thought, he pushed back the hood, folding it into the collar. Similarly, he removed the gloves, concealing them in the cuffs. By this time, he had reached the door in the wall.

He went into the small areaway and stood there, facing the door, waiting. He knew there was no need to announce his presence. That had happened as soon as he stepped up to the door.

"Yes?" said a cautious voice.

"I'm here to see Mr. Ollicham," said Hale, addressing the eye he knew was concealed in the door.

"Who shall I say is calling?" asked the concealed owner of the voice.

"You don't," said Leland Hale. "Just flash him my pic."

There was a short pause, then, "One moment. I'll see if Mr. Ollicham is in."

Hale looked bored and said nothing.

After perhaps fifteen seconds, another voice, different from the first, came over the hidden speaker.

"Well, well! Look who's here!" The voice was dry and thin—almost whispery.

"If you won't mention any names," said Leland Hale coolly, "I won't."

"That sounds fair enough," said the other with a dry chuckle. "What do you want, old friend?"

"If you think," said Leland Hale, "that I am going to tell you that from out here, old buddy-buddy, you are beginning to suffer from senile dementia, in which case I want no truck with you."

The whispery chuckle came again. "You want me to let you in, eh? Now you wouldn't have anything—ah—

personal in mind, would you, my friend?"

"My, aren't we becoming cautious in our old age," Hale said mockingly. "No, this is strictly a business proposition, and I assure you that you're worth a damsite more to me alive than dead. I'm not armed."

There was a slightly puzzled note in the whispery voice as it said, "Yes, so my instruments tell me. However, I'll have to check that more carefully." There was a three-second pause, then, "Come in; the door will open."

Leland Hale strode forward, and the door slid aside.

On the other side were three men. Two of them held beamguns leveled at his midsection.

"Good evening, tots," said Leland Hale politely. But he didn't move any farther. One glance told him that the men holding the beamguns were stoked to the gunwales with dynodine. Their reactions would be half again as fast as normal, and not even Leland Hale wanted to go against odds like that.

The third man, who was unarmed, looked almost as formidable as the other two—or would have to anyone smaller than Leland Hale. He was perhaps a quarter of an inch shorter than Hale's six-six, and was just as broad across the shoulders and chest. "My instructions, sir," he said politely, "are to search you."

"You're welcome to do so, Pin-whistle" said Hale with equal politeness.

The other didn't turn a hair. "The name is Evrit, sir," he said mildly. "And now, sir, with your permission..."

The armed pair bracketed him while Evrit went through Leland Hale's clothing with expert hands. He found nothing simply because there was nothing to find. Hale watched him carefully and decided that Evrit wasn't a dynodine user. He didn't have the jumpy, too-fast mo-

tions of the addict, nor the pleased, self-satisfied look.

Evrit stepped back at last, thoroughly satisfied that Hale was innocent of anything more dangerous than his fists. "The gentleman is clean, Mr. Ollicham," he said.

"Very well," said the whispery voice in the air, "bring him on up to the house."

"Yes, sir," said Evrit. Then, to Hale, "If you'll be so good as to follow me, sir." And he turned and began walking toward the house. Hale followed, and the two gunmen fell in behind, their guns still unsheathed.

The huge house was set in the geometrical center of the hundred-yard-square, wall-enclosed yard. The grounds looked parklike, full of flowering shrubs and trees. There were almost no lights, and the yard was heavily shadowed in places, but Hale would have been willing to bet that any moving thing larger than a tiddlywink wouldn't get more than six inches before it was spotted and cut down. And he would have won that bet.

Once inside the house, the two gunmen were dismissed by Evrit. Hale knew why, and he silently congratulated himself on having decided to come into Ollicham's lair unarmed. The walls and ceiling and floor were lined with tell-tales, all of them leading, no doubt, to a robot brain in the basement. One phony move out of Hale, and there would be no more Hale; he was watched from every angle by a machine that had reflexes a thousand times faster than any human—even if he were full of dynodine.

"You seem to have all the modern conveniences," said Leland Hale.

"We do our best to make Mr. Ollicham's guests comfortable," said Evrit. He led the way into a huge room. "Mr. Ollicham will see you now, sir. Take the large mauve chair, sir, and make yourself comfortable.

You may dial for drinks from the arm of the chair."

"Fine," said Hale, heading for the chair.

"Oh, and, sir..." Evrit called after him.

Hale stopped. "Yes?"

"Please don't leave the chair without Mr. Ollicham's permission."

"I wouldn't think of it," said Hale sincerely.

"Thank you, sir," said Evrit, closing the door.

Leland Hale went over to the chair and sat down, as instructed, but he didn't dial for anything. He simply relaxed and waited.

Less than a minute later, he heard the door behind him sigh softly as it opened, but he didn't look around. There were gentle footsteps on the soft floor, and then a figure came into view. It was an incredibly aged figure, withered and bent with years. The hair was silvery and thin, showing the pink scalp beneath. The face was shriveled and wrinkled. Only the glittering, ratlike eyes showed that the brain inside that aged skull was still as nimble as it had been half a century before.

The ancient sat down carefully in a chair across from Hale and smiled, wrinkling the face further. "Well, Leland Hale, we may speak freely now. Not even Evrit knows what is going on in here—unless I permit it. What have you to say?"

Hale grinned in appreciation. "I never would have believed it. It's the perfect disguise, Granny."

The dry voice chuckled. "At my age, Leland, the difference between the sexes has vanished, except for a few—heh—shall we say, vestigial remnants. If I had actually been a man, I don't think I would now look much different than I do."

Hale nodded in agreement. "You're probably right. In fact, you have me puzzled."

"How so?"

"Ten years ago, you looked exactly as you do now, except that your hair was longer, and there was more of it—a great deal more. And, of course, you wore a woman's clothes. The hair, naturally, was artificial."

"Naturally. So?"

Hale grinned. "So, which is the disguise? Were you a man disguised as a woman on Prannon's World? Did you simply shed that disguise when you came here? Or is it the other way round?"

Again the chuckle. "I should just let you worry about that, Leland," said the whispery voice. "As I said, at my age it makes no difference whatever. The trouble is that you wouldn't worry at all; you're not the kind to worry over something like that. After all, if it doesn't matter to me, why should it matter to you? It wouldn't. So I'll simply say that, although a dozen decades has made me a neuter, I was once a woman."

"And I can believe that or not, as I choose, eh, Granny?"

She smiled. "As you choose. Tell me—how did you find me across all those light-years?"

It was Leland Hale's turn to smile. "Since you are the type to worry, Granny, I think I'll not tell you."

The ancient face darkened. "I could get the information."

"No," said Leland Hale calmly, "you won't. Because you won't even try. Do you think I'd come into this place without safeguards?"

After a moment, the old one chuckled again. "No. No, you wouldn't. I fancy myself an excellent teacher, Leland, and you were always a bright pupil—too bright. You're even clever enough and gutsy enough to walk in here without safeguards because you know that I can't afford to take the chance. I'm afraid I must admit that you're perfectly safe, Leland. Unless, of course, you do something stupid, in which case I will know that it is you, not I, who have

become afflicted with senile dementia."

"Your age has added to your wisdom, Granny," said Hale.

"I dare say," said Granny dryly. "Now, enough of this chattering. You didn't come here just to prove to your old Granny how smart you were; you have something on your mind, and these old nostrils smell money in the wind."

"Your nose was always keen, Granny. You used to be able to smell a five-stellor note three solar systems away."

"I still can," the whispery voice snapped. "Get to the point."

Leland Hale leaned forward in his chair, suddenly businesslike. "What are you paying for dynodine these days?"

Granny's eyes narrowed just the least bit, but the glitter in them became brighter. "Ten stellors per milligram."

Hale grinned mirthlessly. "You're getting a hundred times that from the users."

"That's right," Granny agreed. "One stellor per dose, average. Are you thinking of going into the retail business?"

Hale leaned back, shook his head. "No. In the first place, I know you've got a stranglehold on this whole planet as far as drugs go. In the second place, I haven't the time to get any competition started, even if I wanted to. That takes organization which I haven't established here. In the third place, I think the life would be much too dull for my tastes. Besides, if I'd wanted to sell the stuff retail, I'd hardly have come here to tell you about it."

Granny brushed that aside with a wave of a parchmented hand. "How much have you got?"

Leland Hale had been waiting for this moment. He let the words roll oratorically off his tongue. "Ten million stellors worth."

Unlike Vekkor, Granny did not become bug-eyed. There was only a disbelieving sniff. "If you had a kilo of dynodine, which I doubt, you couldn't possibly get it in to Giffer. This world has an extremely tight block against drugs. It comes in a gram at a time, not a kilogram at a time."

"Granny," said Hale, "you've made two errors. In the first place, I'm offering you *two* kilograms for ten million stellors, and in the second, I don't have to smuggle it in; it's already on Giffer."

"Explain," snapped Granny.

Nothing ever seemed to faze Granny. Until the dynodine was actually at hand, Granny would suspend belief. If and when it appeared, Granny would not be shocked, because reality never shocked that ancient brain.

"It's quite simple," said Hale. "I brought it in legally. Right past the Custom guards with a signed certificate to go with it. One of the nicest cons I've ever worked, though I say it myself."

The aged one remained silent, waiting.

"I picked the stuff up on Venturis V," Hale continued. "Never mind how; that's *my* business, not yours. Besides, it couldn't be done again in a million years. I saw a break and I took it, that's all; nothing fancy, really. I guarantee it can't be traced; they don't even know it's missing back on Venturis V. Otherwise, I couldn't have brought it to Giffer so openly."

"Never mind that," Granny said with deepening irritation in the whispery voice. "How did you get it through Customs?"

"It was a problem," admitted Hale. "Nobody—but *nobody*—ever has that much dynodine on them at one time. I suppose I could peddle the stuff off here and there over the next few years, but why take a hundred little

risks when one big one will do the job?"

"So I became Dr. A. L. DeHallen, an experimental biochemist. I contacted the Worldwide Pharmaceutical Company, here in Greatport, and told them I had perfected a method of synthesizing dynodine, that's all. Naturally, I had to bring proof, and what could be more convincing than a whole suitcase full of the stuff?"

Granny started to chuckle. It developed into a cackle. "Hehehehehe-hee-hee! What a mind! What a brain! And to think you learned so much from your old Granny! I never would have thought of that one! Heheheheh!" The chuckle stopped abruptly. "Go on! Where do you go from there?"

"Nothing could be simpler," said Leland Hale. "The stuff is now quite legally in the vaults of Worldwide. Tomorrow, I will steal it—never mind how; that, again, is my business. When I bring it to you, you will give me ten million stellors, and I will be on my way, flitting amongst the stars as a bee amongst the flowers."

"Piff!" said Granny, irritated. "So much spacedust! How will you leave? You can't have brought your private ship here; this isn't a primitive planet, backward though it may be. If you steal that stuff, A. L. DeHallen will be the first and most obvious suspect. You can't get off in your own *persona*, because Leland Hale would be spotted the minute he stepped out on the spacefield. And they won't let anyone leave after that stuff is found to be missing."

"My dear Granny," said Leland Hale with exasperation, "do you think I'm a complete idiot?"

"That dynodine belongs to me. I haven't taken a centi from Worldwide, and I don't intend to. When I steal it, I will substitute powdered sugar for it, plus a little powdered methylene blue to give it the proper

color. Tomorrow, when they test the stuff, they will find that it's sugar, and they'll call me on the carpet. I'll admit—or rather, DeHallen will admit, somewhat shamefacedly, that he is a phony. But, since, DeHallen hasn't taken any money, no fraud can be proven, and I'll simply be tossed out on my ear. Old man Vekkor won't even try to pull anything, because he'll be ashamed to admit that he was taken in by someone who claimed to have synthesized dynodine.

"Is that more to your taste?"

"Dear Leland," said the whispery old voice in admiration, "your Granny is very proud of you." Then the voice hardened. "But I haven't got ten million stellors. Five is the most I can offer."

Leland Hale shook his head solemnly. "Ten. You're getting it for half price as it is."

Granny considered. "Very well. I know how stubborn you are. I know I'm getting a bargain. I'll have to borrow, but— Well, heheh, *that is my business.*"

"That's an awful lot of cash, Granny."

"The syndicate here will back me," said Granny. "Provided, of course, that the stuff is real. It will mean selling stock all over the planet; it will mean converting holdings into cash at less than market value."

"I know," said Hale. "I appreciate that. That's why I'm offering it to you at half price."

"Actually, I'll be paying almost twenty millions for it in the long run," said the ancient. "I'll lose that much by getting the cash so quickly."

Hale grinned. "Don't kid your darling boy, Granny. You'll never lose anything in the long run or you wouldn't do it."

Granny sniffed. "You'd better go now. I'll be up all night as it is. I have to contact some people on the dayside of the planet so that I can start getting that cash immediately.

And, son—" The old voice grew hard and suddenly chill. "—if you don't deliver, you'll never get off this planet alive."

"I'm aware of that, Granny," said Leland Hale.

The ancient one moved a withered hand on the arm of the chair.

"Evrit!"

"Yes, Mr. Ollicham?" came Evrit's smooth voice.

"Show our visitor out." Then Granny looked at Hale. "As soon as I have left the room, you may get up from that chair. Not before. When you do, go straight to the door you came in through. Evrit will be waiting."

Leland Hale had very few "good" qualities, in the sense that a religious man might use the word, but there is no doubt that he had strong qualities, and that one of these was the ability to improvise. He was a meticulous, careful, detailed plotter, but if something went awry, or if unforeseen factors turned up, he was ingenious enough to use them to improve the outcome of his machinations rather than allow them to destroy him by stubbornly sticking to what might be a dangerously obsolete plan. Nor did such changes in plan, sudden though they might be, ever disturb his outward equilibrium. His brain could work at high speed while he listened blandly to a conversation over a cup of hot spice-tea or played a poker game over a cold deck.

Having returned to his hotel unseen by the same method he had left it, Leland Hale slept for a few hours, then rose and spent an hour reaffixing the plexiskin mask and redyeing his hair, so that when he emerged for breakfast on the stroke of eight he was again Mr. A. L. DeHallen, the portly, smiling visitor from off-planet. He ate a leisurely meal, pored over the local newsfac as though it were of monumental interest, rose, paid his check, went outside, grabbed

an aircab and at precisely half past nine presented himself at the laboratories of Worldwide Pharmaceuticals, briefcase in hand.

Mr. Jaym Vekkor greeted him effusively and offered him a chair.

"Sit down, Mr. De Hallen, sit down," he said bubbly as he rubbed his hands together. "You know, it's a pleasure to do business with you and your company. Imagine! To be given the complete techniques and data on the synthesis of dynodine, and for such a trifling sum as five million stellors! Why, it's amazing! It seems as though there must be a catch somewhere."

Mr. DeHallen looked hurt and astonished. "A catch? Really, sir, do you mean—"

"Oh, no, no," said Vekkor, raising a hand in horror at the words he had allowed to pass his lips. "I only meant that it seemed rather like a dream!"

"You have my credentials, sir," said DeHallen stiffly. "If you—"

"Please sir! You *must* accept my apologies! I really had no intention of..."

After a bit, Mr. DeHallen allowed himself to be mollified to the extent that he deigned to explain how his own company, the Meunster Biochemical Corporation of Sykk III, intended to profit by what was practically a giveaway program.

"The secret would leak out eventually," he said, "and, besides, this great boon to humanity must be spread widely. The present monopoly of the drug by Venturis V is intolerable.

"So we decided that we would sell the secret of the process to one large drug house on one planet in each of the major sectors of the Galaxy, thereby giving them a sector-wide monopoly—for a time, at least. Our own sector, of course, was not included, since we will keep the monopoly there. Certainly, you should be able to make back your five mil-

lion several times over before the secret becomes commonplace."

"Easily," said Vekkor beaming, "easily."

"We, of course, will reap our own profits from our sector, and our reward for the discovery will be the monies paid us by your own house and the others. A tidy sum, but not, I think, too large, in view of the work we have done."

"Indeed not," agreed Vekkor wholeheartedly.

"However," DeHallen said, picking up his thick briefcase, "I have here our standard contract." He opened the briefcase and pulled forth a bulky sheaf of papers. "It is, as you see, a registered form, backed by the Interstellar Police. You will want your legal staff to check it with a semantic analyzer, of course, but I can assure you that it's quite binding and quite fair. And I have been instructed to inform you that it's a take-it-or-leave-it agreement; there will be no changes whatever."

Vekkor looked doubtful for a moment, then he smiled as he took the heavy sheaf. "We'll have it checked, of course, but I feel sure it will be quite satisfactory." He slid the contract into the acceptor slot in his desk and said: "Miss Bourmel, have this routed to the legal department. Tell them take it or leave it."

"Yes, sir," said a soft voice.

"Thank you." Vekkor said. He smiled again at Leland Hale. "And now, sir, if you'll come with me, we'll go down to the vault and get the sample you brought." His smile grew broader. "I can hardly wait to see our Dr. Fyatheg's face when we dump five kilograms of dynodine in his lap for analysis." He chuckled immoderately. Hale had a feeling that Vekkor was not personally fond of Dr. Fyatheg.

Leland Hale said: "You wish to begin analysis immediately?"

Vekkor betrayed a sudden attack

of suspicion, which he tried hard to cover and almost succeeded. "Certainly, Mr. DeHallen. Our Dr. Fyatheg always begins at ten. Did you wish to postpone it for some reason?"

"I see no reason to," said Leland Hale. "The sooner, the better, in fact."

Dr. Fyatheg was a brown-skinned, fussy, balding little man in his late thirties, obviously one of those "A-place-for-everything-and-everything-in-its-place" men. After talking to him for five minutes, Leland Hale had pegged him as a cookbook chemist; the kind of technician who was a precisionist in following the techniques already evolved by others, but utterly incapable of formulating any on his own.

But if Vekkor had had any idea of disconcerting the little chemist with the announcement that there were five kilograms of dynodine to be analyzed, he was sadly mistaken.

"Dynodine," said Dr. Fyatheg. "Yes, indeed. Quite a standard technique. Quite. With, I may say, some very elegant methods involved in checking on the *cis* and *trans* positions of the double bond in the seventh linkage. The normal position, you know, is the *cis*, but the wrong step at the sublimation stage of the extraction can change the bond to *trans*, thereby greatly weakening the physiological effect of the drug."

It was obvious that, to Dr. Fyatheg, five thousand grams of dynodine was not fifty million stellors worth of drug, it was simply a goodly dollop of complex molecules to be analyzed.

The guards brought in the multi-million-stellor container, set it on the chemist's table, and went out. Dr. Fyatheg looked the cannister over carefully, then, without looking at Leland Hale, stuck out his hand, palm up. "The key," he said. Wordlessly, Hale handed over the key.

Fyatheg applied it and opened the

cannister. It was filled to within an inch of the brim with a pastel blue powder.

"Ah, yes," said Fyatheg. "Mmm-hmm." With a small spatula, he laddled a pinch of the stuff into a very tiny glass vial. Then he looked up at Hale and Vekkor.

"If you will excuse me gentlemen. I must get to work."

"How long will this take?" asked Vekkor.

"Three, perhaps four hours. More, if I am disturbed."

Leland Hale and Jaym Vekkor took the hint.

By the time they returned to Vekkor's office, the heavy contract had returned from the legal department with an appended note: *Excellent. Contract recommended.*

There was nothing left for Vekkor and "Mr. DeHalland" to do but sign the contract. It was contingent, of course, on the analysis being run by Dr. Fyatheg, but Leland Hale wasn't worried about that. He had other things on his mind.

As soon as Mr. A. L. DeHalland left the heavily-guarded Worldwide Pharmaceuticals plant after having promised to return in a couple of hours, he strolled around town, apparently aimlessly. He went into several places on little shopping tours, and bought drinks in several of the tonier hostelrys.

After he had made certain that he was not being followed, he stepped into the washroom of one of the bars and simply never came out again.

But Leland Hale was making his way as rapidly as possible back to the Worldwide plant, clad in his invisibility suit, and carrying an equally invisible briefcase.

Half an hour later, he was standing inside the laboratory, watching Dr. Fyatheg putter over his machines and instruments which were busily



analyzing the dynodine. As Hale had half suspected, Fyatheg was using micro techniques. He had never had more than a tiny bit of the stuff to analyze in his life, and micro techniques were the only ones he knew.

The rest of the drug was still sitting where Hale had last seen it. It was as though it were no more than so much blue-tinted sugar. Soon, it would be.

Fyatheg, immersed in his work, took no notice of the peculiar things that were going on behind his back. The cannister of blue powder lifted into the air, tilted, and poured out a cascade of blue, which fell a few inches and seemingly vanished into nowhere.

A minute later, a similar cascade of blue powder materialized from empty air and flowed back into the cannister.

Then all was as it had been before. Almost.

Leland Hale, in his guise as pleasant-faced, elderly Mr. DeHallen, strolled into the Grandview Hotel, nodded politely to the security officers on duty, and retired to his room. Once there, he dialed an outside number on the phone and waited, humming happily to himself while the announcer circuit functioned. Then the screen glowed and the light patterns coalesced into the now familiar features of Evrit. "Yes, sir?" said he, politely.

"Tell Mr. O. I wish to speak with him," said Leland Hale.

"Very well, sir. One moment."

The screen flickered, and Evrit's face was replaced by the incredibly aged face of "Mr. Ollicham".

"I have the wherewithal to fulfill my part of the bargain," said Leland Hale evenly. "How about you?"

The ancient face split in a smile. "I think we can come to terms, as arranged."

"Good," said Hale. "Now, here's what I want you to do..."

Some hours later, and three thousand light-years away, a message was placed in the URGENT file of Interstellar Police Commander Desmon Shelley. It was only one of several, so it was nearly half an hour afterwards that Commander Shelley actually ran the message through his scanner. Immediately afterwards, he went into a flurry of activity that lasted another half hour, most of which consisted of sending messages hither and yon across the Galaxy and waiting for answers.

A century ago, interstellar communication beams were even more likely to get lost than they are today, and our own webworks are far from infallible. An ion storm, a sudden nova, the throbbing pulsation of a Cepheid variable star—any one of these and half a dozen other things can foul up communications. It took time to make sure that a message was sent ungarbled, and received in the same condition, even at the near-instantaneous velocity of subspace radio.

But when Commander Shelley was quite sure of his information, he called Captain Bradney W. Whitter to his office.

Whitter was a tough, shrewd law officer with twenty years of experience behind him and a mind that enabled him to keep one jump ahead of the average lawbreaker and almost even with the best. It had always rankled him that there was one man in the Galaxy that he could never quite catch up to, and when Commander Shelley mentioned that man's name, Whitter's eyes seemed to harden.

"Leland Hale," said the Commander, "is on the planet Giffer, in Sector 521."

"I know where it is," said Captain Whitter. "I've never been there, but I know it's listed as Kamis IV on the charts. What's he up to?"

"I got an anonymous message," said Shelley. "It was addressed di-

rectly to me at this office. All it says is that Leland Hale is on Giffer; it looks as though one of his old pals is giving him the doublecross."

The Interstellar Police, even then, had more than enough to do without paying more than routine attention to anonymous messages or the apprehension of a single criminal. The fact that a full Commander found the matter worth his personal attention attests to the importance of Leland Hale.

"I immediately got hold of the Giffer Planetary Police and asked them to check their immigration files," the Commander continued. "I asked them to check every landing by public or private vehicle in the last hundred days—ever since he pulled that job on Finistella, out near the periphery.

"They ran his specs through the computer, and came up with a name. A. L. DeHallen."

Whitter nodded grimly. "That's one of his pseudonyms, all right. Are they sure it's him?"

"Not completely. The identification is too tenuous. I wish we could rely on fingerprints and eyecone patterns, like the ancients could.

"But this thing is too choice to leave it up to the Giffer police. It seems that Mr. DeHallen is involved with importing dynodine to Giffer."

Whitter's eyebrows lifted, then went down in a scowl. "That sounds like Hale, the son-of-a-white-dwarf!"\*

Whitter was well aware of the dangers of the use of dynodine. It increases the rate of nerve impulse transmission through the nervous system and speeds up the metabolism by a factor of approximately 1.5, depending on the individual and the

strength of the dosage. To the person under the influence of dynodine, the rest of the world seems to move about a third slower than normal, which, in effect, it is. The trouble is that this excessive activity tends to burn out the nervous system, and makes the addict age rapidly—even more rapidly than one would expect from the fifty percent speed-up. The aging rate rises on an exponential curve, as the catabolic processes overtake and pass the anabolic.

Under the influence of the drug, the user feels both a sense of power, from the psychological effect of the speed-up in reflexes, and a dream-like sense of euphoria. The withdrawal symptoms are violent, often fatal, and always damaging to the mind. Suddenly deprived of the drug, the addict will feel the beginnings of the withdrawal symptoms within twenty-four hours. Within forty-eight hours, he is either dead or a hopeless imbecile.

The only antidote is known, logically enough, as antidynodine, and is a derivative of the drug itself.

As far as Captain Whitter was personally concerned, the punishment for anyone who dealt illegally in the drug was that he should be given doses of it for a year and then have the drug taken away from him—cold. In his mind, he relished the thought of doing just that to Hale.

"All right," he said tightly, "What's the set-up, Commander?"

"Nothing difficult—I hope. I have already sent out a pick-up-and-hold order to Giffer's Planetary Police. You get out there and take him off their hands. I don't care what he's done, we have a priority rating on Leland Hale, and we are going to exercise it. I don't want some piddling little Planetary government to give him a death sentence or something before we can get our hands on him." He looked darkly at the palms of his hands, which he held out in front of

\*This colorful, but now obsolete epithet has been traced by etymologists to the fact that the first white dwarf star known to humanity was the Companion (or Mate) of Sirius, which was known as the Dog Star.

him. "I want to get *my* hands on him."

"I'll do my best to bring him in," said Captain Whitter. He looked even grimmer. He still had a white scar in one leg which testified to Leland Hale's accuracy with a megadyne handgun.

"Alive, if possible," said the Commander coldly.

"Yes, sir," said Captain Whitter, mentally repeating the Commander's "*if possible*".

At almost the same time that the "pick-up-and-hold" order reached the Greatport City branch of Giffer's Planetary Police, they were also assailed by a great hue and cry from the officials of the Worldwide Pharmaceutical Company. Someone, it seemed, had absconded with the unimaginable loot of five kilograms of dynodine, which had vanished from under the allegedly watchful eyes of their chief analytical chemist. His first analysis had proved beyond doubt that the substance was, indeed, dynodine. But when a second sample had been taken from the container, it proved to be a mixture of powdered sugar and methylene blue, with only faint traces of dynodine.

Since A. L. DeHallen was also involved in that case, it seemed obvious that his arrest and detainment would aid materially in solving the crime.

An immediate close-down order went out to every spaceport on the planet. DeHallen would not be allowed to leave. Every private and public spaceship was grounded, despite the screams of various space-line authorities. Fortunately, the shut-down order didn't hold for more than fifteen minutes after it was issued. The Giffer Planetary Police nabbed their man.

No sooner had the order been put into effect, than the Giffer PP headquarters in Greatport City got a call from a particularly observant gate-man at the spaceport. A gentleman

calling himself Mr. A. L. DeHallen had boarded the liner *William Logan*, bound for Sykk III. The liner was being held for police investigation.

Since the Interstellar Police were interested in the matter, the Giffer PP sent their best men out to the spaceport to board the *William Logan* to arrest DeHallen. A squad of six tough cops, under the command of Sergeant J. J. Craig, took an air-car to the ship's berth.

Sergeant Craig was a young man in his early thirties. He was hard and tough and smart, and he had been warned that his quarry was dangerous.

He stationed two men at the airlock of the liner, armed with stunguns and megadyne handguns.

"Use your stunguns first," he said. "If anyone comes out of that lock except us, hit 'em. Don't use the beam-guns unless absolutely necessary; he's wanted alive. The rest of you come with me."

Craig, with his three remaining men, went into the ship. The purser, looking a little frightened, met them just inside the airlock.

"You're looking for this DeHallen?" He swallowed. "The captain got the word and told me to wait for you."

Sergeant Craig held out a trimesional photo. "That him?"

The purser nodded nervously. "That's him. He's in Room 19—" He pointed down a passageway. "—down there, first turn to—"

"Show us," said Craig peremptorily.

The purser swallowed and led the way.

Craig didn't bother to knock on the door of Room 19. He opened the door fast and stepped in, stungun leveled.

A broad, heavy-set gentleman with a kindly, wrinkled face and white hair looked up from his seat with mild amazement. "May I ask the meaning of this intrusion, sir?"

Craig kept his weapon pointing at the man's middle.

"Are you A. L. DeHallen?" he asked sharply.

"I am, sir," said the gentleman, still looking kindly, but puzzled.

"Let's see your identification, DeHallen," snapped the cop.

The man who called himself DeHallen stood up to a towering six feet six. "It's in my belt pocket," he said politely. "Do you want me to reach for it?"

"No," said Craig. "Stand where you are. Biffin, go get it. The rest of us will cover you."

One of the officers stepped gingerly over to the big man and relieved him of his identification packet. He had no trouble at all.

Sergeant Craig leafed through the packet, nodded, and said: "Okay, Mr. DeHallen; come with us. You're under arrest."

"And what, may I ask, is the charge?"

"Right now, suspicion of robbery. If we think of anything else, we'll let you know. Come along."

Mr. Jaym Vekkor, of the World-wide Pharmaceutical Company, looked through the transite door of the cell at the big man sitting quietly inside and said to the assembled police officers: "Yes, yes; that's Mr. DeHallen. Are you suggesting that he might have been the one who took the drug?"

"It sure as hell looks like it," said Sergeant Craig dryly.

"But this is ridiculous!" said Vekkor exasperatedly. "Mr. DeHallen is the one who brought us the drug!"

"And may I point out something?" interjected the bogus Mr. DeHallen. His voice sounded muffled from inside the escape-proof cell. "I ask you, Mr. Vekkor, did I *sell* you that dynodine? Did I *give* it to you?"

"Why—uh—no," Vekkor admitted. "It was merely brought as a sample."

"Exactly. Technically, then, the drug still belongs to me?"

"Yes."

"Then," said the prisoner triumphantly, "even if I did take it—which I didn't—you still can't hold me on suspicion of stealing from myself. It isn't legal."

Craig looked baffledly at Vekkor. "Is that right?"

"I'm afraid so," said Vekkor. He suddenly became angry. "Why aren't you out looking for the real culprit instead of harassing Mr. DeHallen? I demand that you release him!"

Craig looked a little confused, but, at that point, the legal deputy from the Planetary Prosecutor's office, who had been listening to the whole conversation, said: "We have reason to believe that this man's real name is not DeHallen, Mr. Vekkor. We think he is an interstellar criminal named Leland Hale."

The name registered with Vekkor. He opened his eyes a little wider, looked back at the man in the cell, and said: "Oh, my!"

"Now," continued the deputy prosecutor, "you mentioned something about a contract. Would you explain again what it was?"

"Again?" sniffed Vekkor. "I have not said what it was, and I don't intend to unless subpoenaed—in detail, that is. In broad, however, I can say that it is simply a business contract, whereby Mr. DeHallen's company has agreed to deliver certain things to my company for a certain consideration."

"I would like to point out," the prisoner interrupted as the deputy prosecutor started to speak, "that no money has changed hands as yet—isn't that right, Mr. Vekkor?"

"That's right."

"And the contract doesn't call for payment until delivery?"

"Right."

"And, finally, even if my company doesn't deliver the goods, they will

be liable only for a civil suit through the Interstellar Police, but under no consideration could criminal charges be brought."

Vekkor nodded. "That is absolutely correct."

Now it was the trial deputy's turn to look confused. But Sergeant Craig had regained his tongue.

"Look here," he said, "we can still hold him on suspicion of illegal trafficking in drugs. He must have taken that stuff to peddle it somewhere."

"If I brought it here to peddle it," said the prisoner logically, "why should I give it to Mr. Vekkor?" And before they could see the hole in that argument, he went on. "Besides, you can't hold me on suspicion of something as silly as that. I wasn't anywhere near the Worldwide plant at the time of the robbery; you haven't traced any of the drug to me except what was legally mine; you haven't caught me in any illegal act. Why am I being held?"

Sergeant Craig looked at the deputy prosecutor. The deputy prosecutor looked at Sergeant Craig. They both turned red and looked at the prisoner.

The deputy prosecutor said: "If you really are DeHallen, we will have to release you with our apologies—unless we turn up more evidence to link you to this. But we can't release you until the Interstellar Police officers get here; we're holding you only because of orders from the Area IP Headquarters."

"I'll sue, of course," said the bogus DeHallen mildly.

"Then you'll sue the IP, not us," said Sergeant Craig gloomily. "Meanwhile, you'll wait."

"I'll wait," said the prisoner calmly.

"Sure you will," said Craig. "Meanwhile, we'll get a couple of the boys to peel that plexiskin mask off you and find out what you really look

like. We want you all prettied up for when the IP gets here."

Three days passed while the communications webworks in that sector of the Galaxy sizzled with messages. Through all the official excitement, the prisoner, now stripped of the plexiskin mask which had made him look like a much older man, sat calmly in his cell, evidently doing the mental equivalent of twiddling his thumbs.

On the morning of the fourth day, an IP ship landed at the spaceport, and an impatient Captain Whitter fidgeted while the police aircar which had been waiting for him scooted through the sky toward the Planetary Police Headquarters at Greatport City.

When the aircar touched the landing deck on top of the building, Captain Whitter leaped out and went with his escort to the office where the chief of the Giffer PP sat scowling at some papers on his desk. Whitter introduced himself to the chief, amenities were exchanged, and Whitter said:

"I've come here to pick up Leland Hale."

"I know," said the chief worriedly, "I know. I hope you can find a charge against him; we can't find any law that he's broken here on Giffer."

"Keep looking," Whitter growled, "and you will. If Leland Hale ever landed on a planet without committing a crime, it was because the planet was uninhabited, undiscovered, and unknown. He breaks a law every morning the way normal people break their fasts. Where is he?"

"Down in the cell block."

"I hope so, Chief; I sincerely hope so. Because if he's gotten away, I'll probably boot you in the tailbone out of pure reflex action. Lead the way."

The Chief led the way to the cell block and then to the cell, where the prisoner, on the other side of the

transite door, could be seen lounging comfortably on his bunk. He sat up and looked at Captain Whitter without recognition.

Whitter stared, opened his mouth, closed it, turned to face the chief again, and bellowed: "Are you sure he's not wearing a mask?"

"Positive," said the chief. "Why? What's the matter? Why are you looking like that?"

"Because, you blithering idiot, *that's not Leland Hale!*" ..

An hour's work checking the brain-pattern of the prisoner merely served to confirm Whitter's statement. The man most certainly was not Leland Hale. He was about the same size and build, but there the resemblance ended.

"But who in the *Galaxy* is he?" asked Captain Whitter, on the verge of apoplexy.

"My name is A. L. DeHallen," the prisoner said stolidly for perhaps the hundredth time since his incarceration. "I am a respectable citizen of Sykk III, here on business. I have committed no crime, and I demand that you release me."

The chief sighed and looked up at Whitter. "He's right. We haven't got a thing against him. Even if he took the dynodine, we couldn't hold him, and we can't prove that he did. He might have sold it on the black market, but we can't prove that, either. We have no record on him—if he's off-planet, we wouldn't have, anyway, and if we did, we couldn't do much.

"We'll have to release him."

Whitter scowled. "What about this job he's supposed to have on Sykk III?"

"We checked on that. The Meunster Biochemical Corporation of Sykk III reports that they hired Mr. DeHallen a month or so ago, and sent him here to negotiate a business contract with Worldwide. He's clean.

After all there's no law says a man can't wear a plexiskin mask if he wants to. Lots of people with disfigured faces, who can't afford surgery—"

"I know, I know!" Whitter interrupted. "But I still say there's something fishy here! This whole thing smells like a Leland Hale trick! I know that crook, and this is one of his jobs! But where is he? What did he do? What happened?"

"Can I go now?" asked the prisoner coolly.

It was an hour later that they released him. Whitter insisted that he be followed, but he managed to shake the tail inside of forty-five minutes. Half an hour after that, he was at the door of the wall that surrounded the home of Mr. Ollicham.

"I am here, Mr. Ollicham," he said.

"So I see, Evrit," came the whispering voice. "How did it work out?"

"Well enough, sir," said Evrit, "but there are a few things that puzzled me."

"Well, come in and tell me about them," said the voice. Then there was a chuckle. "But I must say that our young friend Hale certainly got the worst of the bargain. A paltry ten million for two kilograms of dynodine. Hah! But come in, come in, and report in full."

"Yes, sir," said Evrit, as he stepped through the door.

Leland Hale, by this time, was many parsecs away. He had left on the *William Logan* while Evrit had decoyed the police away by assuming the disguise of "A. L. DeHallen". By the time the IP realized what had happened, he would have landed on Sykk III and be gone again in his own private ship. He had ten million stellors in cash stashed away in his briefcase, and three kilos of dynodine had been dumped after he'd sold two of them. It had been a shame that he couldn't sell them, but five kilo-

grams would have glutted the market on Giffer, and there was no way to get the rest off the planet. Besides, Leland Hale was not the type to repeat himself. He considered it sloppy technique.

He grinned to himself as he thought of the shock old Granny-Ollicham would be getting in a few days.

"Mr. Ollicham! Please! Control yourself!" said Evrit.

"Control myself!" screeched the ancient. "How can you control yourself? Do you see what he's done? He's ruined me! Don't you read the newsfacs? Don't you hear with your ears?"

"Please, sir; your blood pressure!"

"Space take my blood pressure! That young fiend! Do you see what he did? He found out that that company on Sykk III actually *had* discovered a method of synthesizing dy-

nodine! They gave him a five kilo sample to bring here just to prove to Worldwide that they could do it! The contract was legitimate! Look at that newsfac! Look at it! Worldwide has announced that they can synthesize dynodine at a cost of one steller per kilogram! They can cure any addict for practically nothing! The bottom has dropped out of the market! Ten million stellors down the drain! He stole it!

"Damn him! *Damn him! Damn him!* He told the *truth!*" the old voice rose to a high shriek. "*He stole my—*"

Then the voice cracked suddenly, and the ancient figure slumped in the chair.

Evrit ran over quickly. "Mr. Ollicham! Mr. Ollicham! Is something wrong? Speak to me!"

But Mr. Ollicham never spoke nor moved again.

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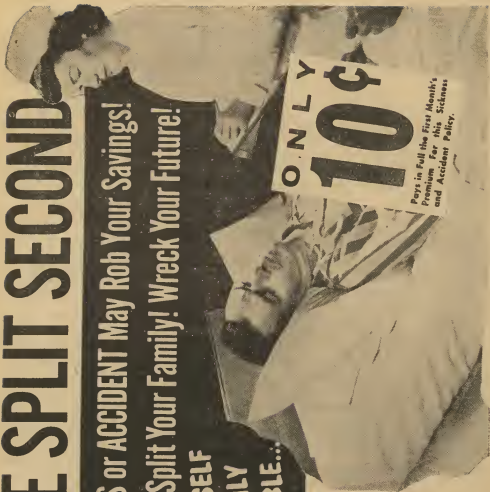
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# LARGE LARGE LARGE LARGE LARGE

by HOWARD FAST

## THE

## LARGE ANT

THERE have been all kinds of notions and guesses as to how it would end. One held that sooner or later there would be too many people; another that we would do each other in, and the atom bomb made that a very good likelihood. All sorts of notions, except the simple fact that we were what we were. We could find a way to feed any number of people and perhaps even a way to avoid wiping each other out with the bomb; those things we are very good at, but we have never been any good at changing ourselves or the way we behave.

I know. I am not a bad man or a cruel man; quite to the contrary, I am an ordinary, humane person, and I love my wife and my children and I get along with my neighbors. I am like a great many other men, and I do the things they would do and just as thoughtlessly. There it is in a nutshell.

I am also a writer, and I told Lieberman, the curator, and Fitzgerald, the government man, that I would like to write down the story. They shrugged their shoulder. "Go ahead,"

they said, "because it won't make one bit of difference."

"You don't think it would alarm people?"

"How can it alarm anyone when nobody will believe it?"

"If I could have a photograph or two."

"Oh, no," they said then. "No photographs."

"What kind of sense does that make?" I asked them "You are willing to let me write the story—why not the photographs so that people could believe me?"

"They still won't believe you. They will just say you faked the photographs, but no one will believe you. It will make for more confusion, and if we have a chance of getting out of this, confusion won't help."

"What will help?"

They weren't ready to say that, because they didn't know. So here is what happened to me, in a very straightforward and ordinary manner.

Every summer, sometime in August, four good friends of mine and I go for a week's fishing on the St.

Regis chain of lakes in the Adirondacks. We rent the same shack each summer; we drift around in canoes, and sometimes we catch a few bass. The fishing isn't very good, but we play cards well together, and we cook out and generally relax. This summer past, I had some things to do that couldn't be put off. I arrived three days late, and the weather was so warm and even and beguiling that I decided to stay on by myself for a day or two after the others left. There was a small flat lawn in front of the shack, and I made up my mind to spend at least three or four hours at short putts. That was how I happened to have the putting iron next to my bed.

The first day I was alone, I opened a can of beans and a can of beer for my supper. Then I lay down in my bed with *Life on the Mississippi*, a pack of cigarettes, and an eight ounce chocolate bar. There was nothing I had to do, no telephone, no demands and no newspapers. At that moment, I was about as contented as any man can be in these nervous times.

It was still light outside, and enough light came in through the window above my head for me to read by. I was just reaching for a fresh cigarette, when I looked up and saw it on the foot of my bed. The edge of my hand was touching the golf club, and with a single motion I swept the club over and down, struck it a savage and accurate blow, and killed it. That was what I referred to before. Whatever kind of a man I am, I react as a man does. I think that any man, black, white or yellow, in China, Africa or Russia, would have done the same thing.

First I found that I was sweating all over, and then I knew I was going to be sick. I went outside to vomit, recalling that this hadn't happened to me since 1943, on my way to Europe on a tub of a Liberty Ship. Then I felt better and was able to go back

into the shack and look at it. It was quite dead, but I had already made up my mind that I was not going to sleep alone in this shack.

I couldn't bear to touch it with my bare hands. With a piece of brown paper, I picked it up and dropped it into my fishing creel. That, I put into the trunk case of my car, along with what luggage I carried. Then I closed the door of the shack, got into my car and drove back to New York. I stopped once along the road, just before I reached the Thruway, to nap in the car for a little over an hour. It was almost dawn when I reached the city, and I had shaved, had a hot bath and changed my clothes before my wife awoke.

During breakfast, I explained that I was never much of a hand at the solitary business, and since she knew that, and since driving alone all night was by no means an extraordinary procedure for me, she didn't press me with any questions. I had two eggs, coffee and a cigarette. Then I went into my study, lit another cigarette, and contemplated my fishing creel, which sat upon my desk.

My wife looked in, saw the creel, remarked that it had too ripe a smell, and asked me to remove it to the basement.

"I'm going to dress," she said. The kids were still at camp. "I have a date with Ann for lunch—I had no idea you were coming back. Shall I break it?"

"No, please don't. I can find things to do that have to be done."

Then I sat and smoked some more, and finally I called the Museum, and asked who the curator of insects was. They told me his name was Bertram Lieberman, and I asked to talk to him. He had a pleasant voice. I told him that my name was Morgan, and that I was a writer, and he politely indicated that he had seen my name and read something that I had written. That is formal procedure when a writer introduces himself to a thoughtful person.

I asked Lieberman if I could see him, and he said that he had a busy morning ahead of him. Could it be tomorrow?

"I am afraid it has to be now," I said firmly.

"Oh? Some information you require."

"No. I have a specimen for you."

"Oh?" The "oh" was a cultivated, neutral interval. It asked and answered and said nothing. You have to develop that particular "oh."

"Yes. I think you will be interested."

"An insect?" he asked mildly.

"I think so."

"Oh? Large?"

"Quite large," I told him.

"Eleven o'clock? Can you be here then? On the main floor, to the right, as you enter."

"I'll be there," I said

"One thing—dead?"

"Yes, it's dead."

"Oh?" again. "I'll be happy to see you at eleven o'clock, Mr. Morgan."

My wife was dressed now. She opened the door to my study and said firmly, "Do get rid of that fishing creel. It smells."

"Yes, darling. I'll get rid of it."

"I should think you'd want to take a nap after driving all night."

"Funny, but I'm not sleepy," I said.

"I think I'll drop around to the museum."

My wife said that was what she liked about me, that I never tired of places like museums, police courts and third-rate night clubs.

Anyway, aside from a racetrack, a museum is the most interesting and unexpected place in the world. It was unexpected to have two other men waiting for me, along with Mr. Lieberman, in his office. Lieberman was a skinny, sharp-faced man of about sixty. The government man, Fitzgerald, was small, dark-eyed, and wore gold-rimmed glasses. He was very alert, but he never told me what part of the government he represented. He

just said "we", and it meant the government. Hopper, the third man, was comfortable-looking, pudgy, and genial. He was a United States senator with an interest in entomology, although before this morning I would have taken better than even money that such a thing not only wasn't, but could not be.

The room was large and square and plainly-furnished, with shelves and cupboards on all walls.

We shook hands, and then Lieberman asked me, nodding at the creel, "Is that it?"

"That's it."

"May I?"

"Go ahead," I told him "It's nothing that I want to stuff for the parlor. I'm making you a gift of it."

"Thank you, Mr. Morgan," he said, and then he opened the creel and looked inside. Then he straightened up, and the other two men looked at him inquiringly.

He nodded. "Yes."

The senator closed his eyes for a long moment. Fitzgerald took off his glasses and wiped them industriously. Lieberman spread a piece of plastic on his desk, and then lifted the thing out of my creel and laid it on the plastic. The two men didn't move. They just sat where they were and looked at it.

"What do you think it is, Mr. Morgan?" Lieberman asked me.

"I thought that was your department."

"Yes, of course. I only wanted your impression."

"An ant. That's my impression. It's the first time I saw an ant fourteen, fifteen inches long. I hope it's the last."

"An understandable wish," Lieberman nodded.

Fitzgerald said to me, "May I ask how you killed it, Mr. Morgan?"

"With an iron. A golf club, I mean. I was doing a little fishing with some friends up at St. Regis in the Adirondacks, and I brought the iron for my

short shots. They're the worst part of my game, and when my friends left, I intended to stay on at our shack and do four or five hours of short putts. You see—"

"There's no need to explain," Hopper smiled, a trace of sadness on his face. "Some of our very best golfers have the same trouble."

"I was lying in bed, reading, and I saw it at the foot of my bed. I had the club—"

"I understand," Fitzgerald nodded. "You avoid looking at it," Hopper said.

"It turns my stomach."

"Yes—yes, I suppose so."

Lieberman said, "Would you mind telling us why you killed it, Mr. Morgan."

"Why?"

"Yes—why?"

"I don't understand you," I said. "I don't know what you're driving at."

"Sit down, please, Mr. Morgan," Hopper nodded. "Try to relax. I'm sure this has been very trying."

"I still haven't slept. I want a chance to dream before I say how trying."

"We are not trying to upset you, Mr. Morgan," Lieberman said. "We do feel, however, that certain aspects of this are very important. That is why I am asking you why you killed it. You must have had a reason. Did it seem about to attack you?"

"No."

"Or make any sudden motion toward you?"

"No. It was just there."

"Then why?"

"This is to no purpose," Fitzgerald put in. "We know why he killed it."

"Do you?"

"The answer is very simple, Mr. Morgan. You killed it because you are a human being."

"Oh?"

"Yes. Do you understand?"

"No, I don't."

"Then why did you kill it?" Hopper put in.

"I was scared to death. I still am, to tell the truth."

Lieberman said, "You are an intelligent man, Mr. Morgan. Let me show you something." He then opened the doors of one of the wall cupboards, and there eight jars of formaldehyde and in each jar a specimen like mine—and in each case mutilated by the violence of its death. I said nothing. I just stared.

Lieberman closed the cupboard doors. "All in five days," he shrugged.

"A new race of ants," I whispered stupidly.

"No. They're not ants. Come here!" He motioned me to the desk and the other two joined me. Lieberman took a set of dissecting instruments out of his drawer, used one to turn the thing over and then pointed to the underpart of what would be the thorax in an insect.

"That looks like part of him, doesn't it, Mr. Morgan?"

"Yes, it does."

Using two of the tools, he found a fissure and pried the bottom apart. It came open like the belly of a bomber; it was a pocket, a pouch, a receptacle that the thing wore, and in it were four beautiful little tools or instruments or weapons, each about an inch and a half long. They were beautiful the way any object of functional purpose and loving creation is beautiful—the way the creature itself would have been beautiful, had it not been an insect and myself a man. Using tweezers, Lieberman took each instrument of the brackets that held it, offering each to me. And I took each one, felt it, examined it, and then put it down.

I had to look at the ant now, and I realized that I had not truly looked at it before. We don't look carefully at a thing that is horrible or repugnant to us. You can't look at anything through a screen of hatred. But now the hatred and the fear was dilute, and as I looked, I realized it was not an ant although like an ant. It was

nothing that I had ever seen or dreamed of.

All three men were watching me, and suddenly I was on the defensive. "I didn't know! What do you expect when you see an insect that size?"

Lieberman nodded.

"What in the name of God is it?"

From his desk, Lieberman produced a bottle and four small glasses. He poured and we drank it neat. I would not have expected him to keep good Scotch in his desk.

"We don't know," Hopper said. "We don't know what it is."

Lieberman pointed to the broken skull, from which a white substance oozed. "Brain material—a great deal of it."

"It could be a very intelligent creature," Hopper nodded.

Lieberman said, "It is an insect in developmental structure. We know very little about intelligence in our insects. It's not the same as what we call intelligence. It's a collective phenomenon—as if you were to think of the component parts of our bodies. Each part is alive, but the intelligence is a result of the whole. If that same pattern were to extend to creatures like this one—"

I broke the silence. They were content to stand there and stare at it.

"Suppose it were?"

"What?"

"The kind of collective intelligence you were talking about."

"Oh? Well, I couldn't say. It would be something beyond our wildest dreams. To us—well, what we are to an ordinary ant."

"I don't believe that," I said shortly, and Fitzgerald, the government man, told me quietly, "Neither do we. We guess."

"If it's that intelligent, why didn't it use one of those weapons on me?"

"Would that be a mark of intelligence?" Hopper asked mildly.

"Perhaps none of these are weapons," Lieberman said.

"Don't you know. Didn't the others

carry instruments?"

"They did," Fitzgerald said shortly.

"Why? What were they?"

"We don't know," Lieberman said.

"But you can find out. We have scientists, engineers—good God, this is an age of fantastic instruments. Have them taken apart!"

"We have."

"Then what have you found out?"

"Nothing."

"Do you mean to tell me," I said, "that you can find out nothing about these instruments—what they are, how they work, what their purpose is?"

"Exactly," Hopper nodded. "Nothing, Mr. Morgan. They are meaningless to the finest engineers and technicians in the United States. You know the old story—suppose you gave a radio to Aristotle? What would he do with it? Where would he find power? And what would he receive with no one to send? It is not that these instruments are complex. They are actually very simple. We simply have no idea of what they can or should do."

"But there must be a weapon of some kind."

"Why?" Lieberman demanded.

"Look at yourself, Mr. Morgan—a cultured and intelligent man, yet you cannot conceive of a mentality that does not include weapons as a prime necessity. Yet a weapon is an unusual thing, Mr. Morgan. An instrument of murder. We don't think that way, because the weapon has become the symbol of the world we inhabit. Is that civilized, Mr. Morgan? Or is the weapon and civilization in the ultimate sense incompatible? Can you imagine a mentality to which the concept of murder is impossible—or let me say absent. We see everything through our own subjectivity. Why shouldn't some other—this creature, for example—see the process of mentation out of his subjectivity? So he approaches a creature of our world—and he is slain. Why? What explana-



tion? Tell me, Mr. Morgan, what conceivable explanation could we offer a wholly rational creature for this—" pointing to the thing on his desk. "I am asking you the question most seriously. What explanation?"

"An accident?" I muttered.

"And the eight jars in my cupboard? Eight accidents?"

"I think, Dr. Lieberman," Fitzgerald said, "that you can go a little too far in that direction."

"Yes, you would think so. It's a part of your own background. Mine is as a scientist. As a scientist, I try to be rational when I can. The creation of a structure of good and evil, or what we call morality and ethics, is a function of intelligence—and unquestionably the ultimate evil may be the destruction of conscious intelligence. That is why, so long ago, we at least recognized the injunction, 'thou shalt not kill!' even if we never gave more than lips service to it. But to a collective intelligence, such as this might be a part of, the concept of murder would be monstrous beyond the power of thought."

I sat down and lit a cigarette. My hands were trembling. Hopper apologized. "We have been rather rough with you, Mr. Morgan. But over the past days, eight other people have done just what you did. We are caught in the trap of being what we are."

"But tell me—where do these things come from?"

"It almost doesn't matter where they come from," Hopper said hopelessly. "Perhaps from another planet—perhaps from inside this one—or the moon or Mars. That doesn't matter. Fitzgerald thinks they come from a smaller planet, because their movements are apparently slow on earth. But Dr. Lieberman thinks that they move slowly because they have not discovered the need to move quickly. Meanwhile, they have the problem of murder and what to do with it. Heaven knows how many of

them have died in other places—Africa, Asia, Europe."

"Then why don't you publicize this? Put a stop to it before it's too late!"

"We've thought of that," Fitzgerald nodded. "What then—panic, hysteria, charges that this is the result of the atom bomb? We can't change. We are what we are."

"They may go away," I said.

"Yes, they may," Lieberman nodded. "But if they are without the curse of murder, they may also be without the curse of fear. They may be social in the highest sense. What does society do with a murderer?"

"There are societies that put him to death—and there are other societies that recognize his sickness and lock him away, where he can kill no more," Hopper said. "Of course, when a whole world is on trial, that's another matter. We have atom bombs now and other things, and we are reaching out to the stars—"

"I'm inclined to think that they'll run," Fitzgerald put in. "They may just have that curse of fear, Doctor."

"They may," Lieberman admitted. "I hope so."

But the more I think of it the more it seems to me that fear and hatred are the two sides of the same coin. I keep trying to think back, to recreate the moment when I saw it standing at the foot of my bed in the fishing shack. I keep trying to drag out of my memory a clear picture of what it looked like, whether behind that chitinous face and the two gently waving antennae there was any evidence of fear and anger. But the clearer the memory becomes, the more I seem to recall a certain wonderful dignity and repose. Not fear and not anger.

And more and more, as I go about my work, I get the feeling of what Hopper called "a world on trial." I have no sense of anger myself. Like a criminal who can no longer live with himself, I am content to be judged.

# FANNOTATIONS

BY BELLE C. DIETZ

SLIGHTLY tardy Season's Greetings to all of you and I'm happy to be back reviewing science fiction fan magazines again. The hiatus in doing so was caused by my attendance at the 17th World Science Fiction Convention in Detroit and a vacation in London soon thereafter (where, contrary to expectation, it didn't rain once). The stack of fanzines awaiting attention seems mountainous and, naturally, not all can be mentioned. An effort will be made in future columns, however, to include as many different ones as possible. And now, as the English say, let's get on with it.

ORION #23 (Ella Parker, 151 Canterbury Road, West Kilburn, London N.W. 6, England) can be obtained for a multitude of reasons, chief among them trade, contribution, comment, friendship or money, although I don't know how much of the latter, Ella doesn't say. The cover by Adkins and interior headings by Atom are up to their usual high standards and the contents follow right along. Particularly enjoyed was a piece by Sid Birchby on distaff fans and two pages of Atom's wonderful drawings. This editress is still

getting used to her mimeograph, resulting in very uneven duplication but the contents and the letter column make squinting rewarding. Recommended.

NEW FRONTIERS VI#1 (Stellar Enterprises, P.O. Box 336, Berkeley 1, Calif.) costs 30¢ apiece or 4 for \$1 and is edited by Norm Metcalf. Although this carries a Dec. 1959 date-line, some of the material has obviously been in the editor's hands for a year or more. It is half-size, center-stapled and printed, resulting in quite a professional appearance and the contents are really stellar. There's an article by L. Sprague deCamp on the conception, progress and publication of his Krishna stories, a this-is-what's-wrong-with-science-fiction one by Mark Clifton and a piece on fantasy fiction by Robert Barbour Johnson. E. Everett Evans (now deceased) also contributed a shortie about the party given for E. E. "Doc" Smith in December 1957. Book reviews, fanzine reviews and advertisements make up the balance of the issue. I hesitate to call this a fanzine, what with its pro contributors and polished aspect, made further singular by the fact that it is a first issue.

The effect is marred somewhat by the dated contents but this will probably be corrected in future issues. Worthwhile reading.

PSI PHI #4 (Arv Underman, 5304 Sherbourne Drive, L.A. 56, Calif., and Bob Lichtman) is a slick (paper) production which simply cried out for reviewing. You can get it for 15¢ but trades, contributions, comments or any combination thereof seems to be preferable. The contents, in my opinion, are too esoteric for the real newcomer to sf fandom but a treat for those in the "know". There's Weber & Pfeifer's report on the latest Westercon; Ted Johnstone's idea of casting and music for a stupendous sf movie (based on the theory that if you're going to dream, dream big); a bit of extrapolating by Len Moffat on how some of his West Coast friends might review an imaginary fanzine and a fairy tale rewritten to the sf fan angle, all of which I found very amusing. The letter column rounds out the issue nicely, with many interesting, well-written, —edited and—answered letters from some of the best writers in fandom. The only discordant note is that the dittoed reproduction tends to fade out in spots but the layout is good and the whole fanzine reads smoothly and pleasantly.

Although the following are not the usual manner of fanzines, they are of special interest and noteworthy therefor:

BEST OF FANDOM-1958 (Guy E. Terwilleger, 1412 Albright Street, Boise, Idaho, 75¢) is an anthology of selected pieces from fanzines published in 1958. A very worthwhile addition to the aficionado's shelves and a wonderful way for the newcomer to see what quality fanzines can produce. Beautifully reproduced by ditto with a section of artwork in colors. Highly recommended.

FANDOM'S COOKBOOK (Ruth Kyle, c/o Radio Station WPDM, Potsdam, N.Y., 40¢) A slim volume, attractively reproduced by photo-off-set, containing 41 recipes selected for ease of preparation as well as tastiness. All were contributed by sf fans and are labelled accordingly. Worth the cost if only to obtain Algis Budrys' recipe for *Beer Coaster Pancakes* and the one for *Blog* by Bill Donaho.

FANCYCLOPEDIA II (Dick Eney, 417 Ft. Hunt Rd., Alexandria, Va., \$1.25) is, as its title implies an encyclopediac explanation of the whys, wherefores and origins of fannish terms, ideas, organizations and the like, and could well be subtitled "Guide to SF Fandom". An exceptionally impressive job, nicely executed, clearly mimeographed and containing a vast wealth of information, interesting to the long-time fan and fascinating to the neophyte. This 186 page reference work should be an integral part of all good sf libraries, whether they consist of 30 or 3,000 volumes. Highly recommended and very cheap at the price.

Not out as yet but scheduled for publication in late spring 1960 is a CHECKLIST OF SCIENCE FICTION ANTHOLOGIES, compiled by Walter R. Cole. This will list over 3,000 sf stories from more than 100 anthologies published during the past half-century; will be photo-off-set and will have spiral bindings. Pre-publication orders are now being taken at \$3 a copy if remittance is enclosed; \$4 otherwise and \$5 post-publication. Since it promises to be a tremendously useful reference work and will probably sell out quickly, you are advised to send your order immediately to Walco Publications, 307 Newkirk Avenue, Brooklyn 30, N.Y. if you want to make sure of your copy.

# THE LUTINE BELL

by TOM  
and GLADYS CLUFF

"GENTLEMEN, gentlemen!" begged Waring. "What is the matter with everyone? It's only propaganda, you fools!— *Please, gentlemen!*"

Waring is pompous and unpopular dean of the under-writers at Lloyd's of London; so dedicated a snob that, with all dogdom to choose from; he raises yapping little pugs, because they are an *established* breed. He and Barclay are the two oldest underwriters in the Room. Barclay is short, ruddy and grizzled, with an old seaman's thatched far-sighted eyes, blue as a child's. Waring is a huge man, heavy and darkly smooth, with the jowls and other characteristics of a blood-hound. He harries without respite for a cathedral hush in his sacred domain. —But voices were reeled full out, in outrage.

For a Satellite ship claimed to have sighted a flagless but allegedly British vessel, *bark-rigged* and *three-masted*, in mid Baltic, heading toward Leningrad! Dodging into a fog-bank when signaled. A secret-weapon ship, proclaimed the Russians, caught red-handed in an attempted attack on Kronstadt!

"We have *no* ship in the Baltic. —Have we?"

"*Bark-rigged?* This is 1951! At least it is in London.

It was a routine, nasty fall morning. Fifty of us, with fifty colds, coughed, and sneezed, and doodled on blotters or milled about the floor of the big Underwriter's Room, quietly discussing insurance rates, the month's losses, the weather, the flu. Innocently waiting for the early wires to come in.

I'm with the Admiralty at Whitehall, where we get Navy and Dominion news direct of course. But Security has to screen general shipping news too, and Lloyd's is the place for that. So twice a day I go over and process their dispatches; it takes only a few minutes to check and stamp them, then I'm free to have morning coffee and afternoon tea in the so-called Captain's Room—and sit in on the hottest shipping gossip in the world.

Barclay, whose desk I borrow, was taking bows for his maiden literary effort, an article in the Sunday Times

passionately deploring the unsolved mysteries of those eighteen hundred or so old ships listed in Lloyd's red-bound files as Missing—and then forgotten. Barclay is no writer, but that piece was enough to turn every man in England with a drop of shipping in his blood or even on his book-shelves, into a skin-diving one-man Crusade.

I cleared a corner of his desk of the usual charts and photostated records of Lost Ships that he can't cram into his pockets—to produce like pictures of his grandchildren—and sat waiting; staring up at the famous Lutine Bell, dredged so long ago from the North Sea bottom, to hang here high and dry under its canopy and toll for dead ships; wondering, with that anticipated shudder that almost shapes a wish, if it might ring today. For the ceremony is as theatrical as some mystic rite of the Middle Ages. The only man who touches the bell, the red-gowned Caller up there on his rostrum, reaches straight above his head and pulls the lanyard that hangs from the clapper. The bell sounds once, vibrating the last inch of air in the room, and in absolute silence everyone rises; *a ship is dead*. Then in a single wave they surge forward to hear *what* ship; how many lives; whose losses. This very bell tolled for the Titanic, the Lusitania—  
"Avast below!"

Barclay grinned as I jumped, and a persimmon-haired page boy I hadn't seen around before unloaded an armful of books where I'd been sitting. "Righto, Captain Barclay, another batch." The boy made the Victory sign. "Come in *AGLAIA*!"

"She's the ship I'm working on now, Netherton. I have a hunch that this time—"

But the party was over for Barclay. Waring loomed, monstrous and black and sudden as a thunder-cloud.

I think Waring had intended to ignore the Times affair; he'd been showing around an American visitor quite amiably. But all this hand-shak-

ing for Barclay he couldn't take. "Very cheap sensationalism, Mr. Barclay." (He never acknowledges the Captain.) "Practically an open letter *begging* funds, for *Lloyd's*! A bit too cheap for some of us. You, undoubtedly, would *like* to see *Lloyd's* sponsoring a Treasure Hunt. —I shall issue an official disclaimer of any responsibility or authority for such tommy-rot." He stalked off, with the embarrassed visitor in tow.

Barclay's audience, guiltily avoiding his eye, melted away. For Barclay is a man you love, but Waring is a man you placate. —An official disclaimer? Then unless Barclay could prove, literally and in immediate reply, the *relevance* of his fanatical concern for these long-forgotten ships, he would be expected to—would as good as *have* to—resign.

Barclay couldn't miss knowing that Waring wanted him out of Lloyd's; it was an old jealousy and I don't think he really cared, Waring wasn't a person he cared about. But this was the first time he'd faced the full truth; that Waring intended, fair means or foul, to get him out. And that would break Barclay's heart.

"Blast the man! He does that, and who's ever going to take me seriously? —Oh well,"—noticing the page's distress—"maybe we'll still find something useful on the *AGLAIA* in time." But he tapped out his pipe and didn't relight it, which I'd never seen him do before in his life. "All I wanted," he said bitterly, "was to interest one younger historian, to carry on after me with this criminally unfinished business. Eighteen hundred old ships *waiting* on the bottom of the sea, and nobody lifting a finger to *find out* about them! How *can* a ship rest till her report is in?"

His eyes burned, partly I suppose with fanaticism, but partly with actual fever; the man was sick, he ought to be home in bed. But Barclay hasn't a relative in the world to look after him, the war made a clean sweep

there. —He had a loyal friend here though; the page distinctly spat "Stinker!" at Waring's retreating stern, and his face was pure outraged hero-worship—for old Barclay! Who was undeniably an Ancient Mariner, waylaying one with that pointing pipe of his to tell again his tale of some old ship. —Not that Barclay hadn't meant plenty around here once. In the first war he skippered his own merchant ship, and for years after that, badly shot up, he himself reigned here in the Room; the fourth generation Derek Barclay at Lloyd's. Until Waring blatantly maneuvered him out. Shelved him. Oh, he still came in every day and wrote a few risks and had his coffee and tea breaks with the regulars. But most of his time he spent contentedly enough in Lloyd's Library, as self-appointed historian of lost ships; with the actual risk-books of his own grand-dad-dies back to the eighteenth century days when Lloyd's was a Coffee-House, for source-material. But Waring was *not* contented: when Lloyd's declared a ship lost it was Lost. Case closed.

Barclay introduced the young red-head. "Albert is our newest, most enthusiastic page, and my invaluable assistant. —Albert, Mr. Netherton here decides what's good for the press and the BBC to know about shipping—and what isn't good for them."

"*You* spoon out news to the *BBC*? Yow!—sir," exclaimed Albert, and stared with such awe and admiration at the notorious Room and all of us privileged to operate in it that I warmed to the lad. I feel that way myself about Lloyd's of London.

Five minutes later pandemonium broke loose.

"But Waring, we can't *ignore* a charge like that!"

"It's the only dignified thing we can do."

"Dignified be damned, if one of our

ships *has* got into the Baltic, God knows how or why, are we just going to *leave* her there? What about our Allies?"

Waring looked at me. "Properly, Netherton, this is your department, you know. Shall we let the Admiralty cope?"

The Admiralty went along with Waring; hilariously voted it just a particularly juicy hunk of propaganda against the war-mongering west, issued a flat statement that none of His Majesty's ships were in the Baltic, and washed *their* hands.

But it wasn't that easy. Satellite ships were sighting the outlandish vessel off Helsinki, off Danzig, in the lower Cattegat. We began hearing from some increasingly uneasy Allies.

Given enough evidence, fantastic or not, if you've a stomach like mine you *feel* guilty. I itched for honest England.

And Barclay—in some elusive but important way I *trust* Barclay. An old sailor's eyes take long steps, maybe from watching the horizon instead of the kerb. I don't hold that sailors are any more credulous than anybody else. But the vision of a man used to the curved distances of the sea finally shapes to that curve; stretches a bit over the edge we townsmen settle for. And Barclay was *concerned*; far beyond his personal troubles. (Waring's over-vehement "official disclaimer" had back-fired badly; it happened to have been printed directly opposite the first news of the Mystery ship, and the juxtaposition set people imagining all sorts of hidden motives.)

"Well," Barclay said mildly, "certainly a disturbing *imitation* of one of His Majesty's ships is giving a highly disturbing *effect* of being in Baltic waters. That maverick gets around too fast even for Soviet hot-air propulsion. I'm going on a research binge." He smiled grimly. "I'd *better* come up with an answer. Waring claims it was my article put the Russians up to the whole idea."

"Good Lord. Forget it, Barclay. Go home and get some sleep."

"Not in hurricane weather. Funny, I have that old mother-hen, *responsible* feeling." And the man trotted off to try to solve our number one national headache in the musty files of a library.

When the continental and then even the American press began to get nasty, we made the whole subject Restricted. But people had already heard too much, and there were amateur wireless sets of course, and unrestricted foreign newspapers for sale—while they lasted.

Notes from the Embassies Demanded To Know. Stiffening Russian threats of retaliation had us each in his private brand of jitters: a postman asininely kept his children home from school and started an epidemic of truancy; pubs showed a fine boom in business: with my sure penchant for the ignominious I was laid up three days with a hideous case of hives. We were putting in a twelve hour day and getting precisely nowhere with a preposterous ghost, that appeared dead set on poking up a war.

And then, bless its stony heart, a Russian cruiser sighted the ship off the Gulf of Riga and sank her! By now we didn't care when or where, they *sank* her!

Thank God, we breathed, and unfurrowed our brows and even smiled again experimentally at our fellow men. I called up my stunned wife and invited her to the cinema; she said she didn't recall the voice. Albert must have spent a deliciously successful evening with his estranged Violet, who was willing to wait four years while he put himself through night-school, but had *not* counted on Saturday night alone with her mother. "Fixed it up!" he grinned, and whistled piercingly between his fingers, not ten feet from Waring.

Only Barclay saw nothing to celebrate. If there'd been no ship in the

Baltic, then nothing had been sunk. If there was such a ship, we'd better be finding whose she was, if we expected to keep any Allies at all. With his muffler, and a steamer-rug that Doris—my wife—had insisted I bring in to him, he went back to that clammy library.

He was right, it was too good to be true. Four days later the same ship reappeared quite unsunk, two hundred miles to westward. —Or else, God help us, there were two of them.

A Washington spokesman stated loyally that the President accepted the British denial; but a featured editorial the same day was captioned, "More U.S. Billions for British Bombs?"

And then the *Danes* sighted her.

A Danish passenger vessel, twenty witnesses, passed a grey three-masted ship steering east off Lithuania, about a mile abeam. No flag, but her lines and rig definitely British.

Western corroboration! That was enough for the Russians. Their Navy, they announced all over the air, was already out, their Air-Force combing the Baltic; the ship—any unidentified ship in those waters—would be found and sunk within hours.

There followed in that small fateful monitor's room the silence of complete consternation. This was war talk. In the eyes of the western world too now, our ship was the aggressor, and she was going right on aggressing in defiance of our own allies' protests; and we couldn't do a thing about it because, simply, she *wasn't our ship*.

"The show's up, we can't hush this. The press will have to notice a Danish report."

"They'll jolly well have to *not* notice it! That *would* bring on questions in the Commons. And however Churchill cares to explain it, Floating Saucers or Flying Englishmen or tiddleywinks with his daughter by signal-code, *anything's* going to set *everybody* off."

So we agreed to keep it out of the papers for one more week; if we could. But the questions came on in the House anyway, and Mr. Churchill magnificently and simply denied everything, including any knowledge of the Baltic Sea *being* Soviet property in the first place. The Navy, he concluded solemnly, had carefully counted its warships and couldn't find a thing missing.

We had all stayed through to hear the BBC broadcast of this show—which naturally aroused more suspicion than it allayed—and I missed my bus home and had to transfer all over the place and walk two miles, rubbing a brutal blister on my heel. When I did get there Doris had eaten the last piece of chocolate cake, that I'd been telling my blister about for half a mile, and gone to bed and to sleep. I hated her, and everybody else; I could have cried.

The next day was Guy Fawke's Day, speeches all over. But Whitehall had the flu en masse and Lloyd's was a tomb. The limp straw effigy dangling from a molding actively depressed me, I started to rescue the poor chap. It seemed to me he'd had enough trouble while he was alive, didn't we all, without resurrecting it every year forever. But Waring was horrified: "Oh no, that *always* hangs there on Guy Fawke's Day, it's—"

"I know I know I know. An Established Custom," I finished on cue, and jerked the noose tight again, seeing and feeling the miserable little neck as Waring's, with intense satisfaction.

But he was still alive and in a real tizzy by eleven, when we all jostled into the Captain's room for coffee. His fury was not, surprisingly, with the ubiquitous ship, nor the Russians nor the Danes; all mentioned however. —And the Admiralty, (he threw in for me,) what a splendid job *they'd* made of this scandal! But it was the idiot citizens of London whom he utterly failed to understand.

"Why, they're baffled," said Barclay mildly as we found places at the big table. "That alarms them, it's un-English."

"We're all baffled," I said impatiently. "We can't find comfortable *authority* for a ship—"

"Let's drop it, shall we, gentlemen?" suggested Waring. Only it wasn't a suggestion, it was an order, and I always begin to itch when he pulls that Let's eat up all our nice rice pudding now, *shall* we? —I was as sick of the damn ship as he was, but way beyond that I was *worried*. And there he sat, crowding me, smug in his role as the Last Upholder of I don't know what, spooning half a bowl of sugar—all there was—into his coffee, slanging my outfit, playing down plain desperation as *gossip*. Waring was being just too patronizingly Waring; I *wanted* to get under his skin.

"Barclay," I said clearly, "you've got a mystery ship of your own on the ways; how's *she* doing? If you'll brief us a bit on yours, maybe we'll find some mutual pattern. Two negatives, you know."

Barclay had been pop-eyed all morning with some hoarded excitement. Maybe, I dreamed, he *had* found something on that *AGLAIA* of his. Eagerly he began hauling out his stuff. But Waring leaned his big shoulder across my starboard bow so abruptly that he upset my lifted cup. It was full and hot. I was burned, wet through, my clothes a mess. —And Waring just half-grunted Sorry, and went on talking past my face and Barclay's to the man beyond us. Shutting me up. Totally ignoring Barclay, who was hurt, and had been hurt enough.

It made me mad. Waring's attitude of holy *identification* with Lloyd's boils down to simple personal vanity. And I don't like his fat hands that ought to be clumsy but aren't. —Sopping and humiliated and furious, I pushed back from the table and



stalked out. For good, I promised myself.

Oh, all of us were fagged to a frazzle. From neglected wives to international relations, everything had been pushed a shade past its limit, by a *non-existent ship*. And Waring is Waring. But suddenly I was fed to the teeth with that gentleman and glad to risk my job letting him know it with a fine bang of the door.

So I got home early, in time for tea.

Doris outspokenly does not share my feeling for Lloyd's. To her it's still a Coffee House, doubling for a Country Club, which she's convinced is going to ruin my kidneys. I explained that Waring, not caffeine, had turned me whatever color she thought I looked, and that her worries were over anyway, I was through with Mr. Waring's private club. Permanently.

I must have sounded good and upset, for without a word she laid out sardines and sea-biscuit and chocolate cake, my favorite tea. —Which I couldn't eat, so then she knew this was serious. "Now drink that tea, Teddy," she ordered. "A sensible cup of tea and you'll wonder what your tantrum was all about. Tomorrow you go straight back there as usual."

"After the epic way I barged out? I see myself."

"How you left is all in your own mind. Messed over with spilled coffee like that I'm sure they just thought you were hurrying to the wash-room. Don't be silly and go cutting off your own nose," she said briskly.

"I can get along without Lloyd's," I sulked.

"Maybe I've made remarks about Lloyd's Coffee House," she admitted. "But it's your other girl, don't you see?" I said she didn't sound too perturbed. "Well I will say I prefer a lot of whiskery old ships to one slinky young secretary. —And they need you. A man who knows by heart the whole history of the Navy clear back to when we lived in caves and

wore woad and probably couldn't even swim!—why you must be worth your *weight* in coffee over there! Here, here's a lovely fat sardine. Don't pay any attention to those stuffed shirts. What do a lot of insurance men know but insurance?"

"Barclay knows plenty more," I said defensively, tucking the obscene great sardine out of sight under a biscuit.

"Yes, I always liked that one," said Doris, who had met him once, for perhaps two minutes. And without a word she called him up and asked him to dinner; then, that night. He accepted, too; he had something terrific to show me. Poor Barclay, he found something terrific on an average of once a month.

It's funny, he was surprised to find me in such a stew, he *had* supposed I was just lamming it to the wash-room, and would be back in. He had this smashing new material on the *AG-LAIA*, and he'd brought the whole business. His eyes shone. "Could you read it tonight, Netherton, and bring it back in tomorrow?" I caught Doris' triumphant eye. "It's terrific! Like hearing of Trafalgar for the first time!"

Barclay worked so hard, so alone, and those deep-socketed child-blue eyes looked so innocently hopeful. But Barclay's lost ships, like new oilwells, built to peak excitement—and came in sand and water. Still, I did give the stuff a look, after he left. —And poured over it half the night. For the story of the *AGLAIA*, if I was right about the context, was terrific.

The next morning was crisp and invigorating, the sun would be out by noon. We had kippers for breakfast, Leadenhall Street seemed suddenly the most fascinating thoroughfare in all London, and I was so bursting to see Barclay that I got there half an hour early. Even indoors the air smelled zesty from a jug of big yellow chrysanthemums that someone

had brought in, apparently Albert, or else he'd found them irresistible; he was sporting an identical huge blossom in his buttonhole. No Waring yet, and he's always one of the first; the flu must have gotten him down. Which took a little of the wind out of my sails; I'd wanted to watch his face. But this wouldn't keep.

Silently I laid out the brittle, brown-edged old papers on Barclay's desk, and our eyes met. "I can't believe it, you know. But I *have* to." I said.

"I knew you'd see it!" He anchored the pamphlet open with his pipe. "It's *there*. Every detail checks—so far."

"Barclay—do you really expect—"

"Yes," he answered quietly. "Don't you?"

"I honestly don't know. My God man!"

Others were sensing our excitement. A nervous man in a plaid tie breathed over my shoulder. "What's the matter?" he asked. "Is something the matter?"

They all banked in then, and I looked at Barclay.

"You tell them," he said. "I've this beastly cough. And I've heard I'm long-winded."

So I recounted the life and death of *HMS AGLAIA* for a group of wary underwriters and Navy brass, to whom, as they began one at a time, dimly and incredulously, to suspect, this loss which occurred so long ago as to seem pure legend, was—perhaps—*relevant*.

In 1851 the *AGLAIA*, a bark-rigged steam sloop of war, extra-heavily armed for her time, set sail for a North Sea cruise and never returned. She was listed as missing with all hands, a presumptive total loss; the C.O.'s widow was paid sixty pounds by Barclay's great grandfather, a Lloyd's underwriter of the Coffee-House days, for the policy in my hand, on her husband's uniforms and possessions.

"That's all I had on her for

months," Barclay interrupted. "Then I discovered this whole packet of material, properly forwarded by the British Ambassador in Washington to our Admiralty!—And lost in our own library all these years! Filed," he added bitterly, "under Agamemnon."

"I'll summarize," I said, "from this old ship's-log and these letters and papers, and their decoding—they were water-soaked to illegibility—by a Navy technician in Washington; seventy years ago."

They were all listening now.

On November 8, 1851, a Danish brig picked up, floating in the Baltic, a young British naval lieutenant, quite demented from forty-eight hours in that icy water. He could remember neither his name nor that of his ship. Lashed to him was a small keg half full of salt water but containing these ruined papers. The brig, after a stormy Atlantic crossing, put into a little port in the state of Maine for water, and there she left the castaway, still, and to the end of his life, mentally blank on everything previous to his rescue.

He was then a good-looking young chap around thirty, with high color and very black thick eyebrows and some queer accent; at first he was believed to be Irish; a warm, friendly man in his good periods. He turned out to be an expert boat-rigger and to have a fine baritone voice, sang in the church choir; and some of the songs—hymns, from the ring of them—that he sang to himself when he was calm and at rest between his desperate spells of trying to write and send some vital message, were in a strange language. He met every ship that docked, but would go dumb when he got there, and forget what he'd come for, and would hammer his head with his fists and mutter two words that sounded like "folbock" and "folbower." (All this the local padre wrote in the letter he sent to Washington with the man's papers; as I said, seventy years ago.)

The villagers liked and respected and worried about him. They called him Mr. Singer and would have visited him in his solitary cottage; but that wild driven look would come over his face and he'd mumble "Confidential documents, must report," and bolt the door. A naturally sociable man, he lived like a hermit, with only that terrible compulsion to get his message through. That obsession ruined his life. And yet it gave it great purpose. For a dedicated man is lonely but he lives on a high plane, and merely by so living he accomplishes something more, I believe (I said), than he knows. Captain Derek Barclay here is such a man. (The single cheer was Albert's.)

Thirty years later Singer was still trying to send that message. He was standing tongue-tied on the dock holding a scrap of paper as a small coastwise ship steamed out. A girl on the dock called, laughing, to some man aboard, "Come again, Mr. Davis!"

The name shot through Singer like a streak of lightning. *That was his name!*

"Wait!" he cried. "Report! Report! I am Davis, of—"

He never noticed where he was, the padre said in his letter. He forgot everything but getting his message to a ship already fifty feet away. He stepped straight off the dock.

They might have gotten to him by hauling in the tethered skiff he struck his head against, if they'd realized in time that the man couldn't swim.

So he drowned, with his paper still in his hand, and the words he'd been trying all those years to say, drowned with him in his throat.

Neighbors found in his cottage the cask of papers and a pile of attempted messages, but only the diary gave any clue. A dim "-S A-L- -A" suggested the name of a ship, so the padre bundled the lot together and sent it to Washington. A technician's report

from there dated 1883 declared the book to be *HMS AGLAIA'S* log. And after no stranger off any ship for thirty years ever spotting Davis' nationality and thus maybe saving his wits, this technician said his exclamations FFwlbach and FFwlbawr were Welch words meaning Little Fool and Big Fool!

The papers were the C.O.'s report: Secret Orders directed the *AGLAIA* to proceed to the Baltic and examine the Russian coast for new fortifications. She was to avoid speaking to any ships, but if attacked should display the British colors and take necessary action. She was *not* to approach the Gulf of Finland, where both entrances were known to be controlled.

So the *AGLAIA* sailed down the Cattegat with fires banked ready to steam, working close in along the Russian coast. On the night of November 5 she anchored to wait for daylight to explore the Riga Strait. At dawn the C.O. gave orders to "Boil the kettle." In a patchy fog she ran out her estimated distance and cleared for action, still unable to see land until, half a mile to port, the southern shore of Osel Island loomed through the fog. —And what they were looking for; a mass of uncharted masonry on the point. As the *AGLAIA* moved under slow bell for the C.O. to diagram this new fortification, she was fired on from shore, the ball falling just short: an order to stop, in any navy's language. But she did not stop, nor return fire.

"She was under *orders* not to stop!" Albert defended her. "Our *colors* hadn't been fired on, she wasn't flying them!"

The log read: 8:53. Full ahead. Half starboard helm to run for nearby fog-bank.

"I say, isn't that awfully f-funny, sir?" stuttered Albert excitedly. "It's exactly like—I mean, right there in the Baltic, and *our* ship, fired on by

the Russians! And the fog-bank—"His voice trailed.

I glanced up. Against the dark panneling the boy's face was pale and oddly still, *held* still, his grey startled eyes wide with that same stillness, as they edged toward something outside their familiar orbit.

"Get on with it, Netherton," impatiently urged an older voice.

8:55 (the log finished.) Salvo from shore. Ordered hoist colors at mizzen. Ordered port broadside return fire. 100 pound solid made two hits within Russian masonry, observed two spouts of sand.

Then came the single survivor's final report; the report he knew had to be made and that he alone *could* make.

And this, gentlemen, is his reconstructed message; the record of an almost-accomplished mission.

"Respectfully report *HMS AG-LAIA* split in two by fire from Osel Island fort, which fired on British colors. Captain and Exec. killed. Engine room watch all burned to death from steam. —Entire crew dead. Respectfully submit seven-inch breach-loaders defective in design. —Placed orders and sketch of Osel fortification, dimensions estimated, in cask. Must jump."

And later, added while afloat: "9:12 ensign disappeared, ship sank. Delay in forwarding this report unavoidable. 6th November, 1851."

Lieutenant Davis had put all documents in a cask, lashed it to his body, and either jumped or been washed overboard. That he remained conscious is clear from repeated statements that ship and ensign sank at 9:12, which is believed to be observed time from the two entries, "Watch stopped 9:53," and "Watch sank."

The conclusion accepted by our Washington Ambassador and forwarded to but never read by the Admiralty here—due to erroneous packaging with Agamemnon material—is that the *AGLAIA* sank with all hands

but one at 9:12 by the survivor's watch, November 6, 1851.

"Look!" Albert pointed to the clock above the bell canopy. 10:06, it read. "One hour and six minutes ago *here*, it was the same time and the same date as it was *there, then*, when she went down! 9:12, November sixth—a hundred years ago!"

We all looked up at the clock, some amused at young Albert, some impressed by coincidence, some eying Barclay and me oddly. Fifty of us; even the Caller was still down on the floor with us instead of up on his rostrum; setting his watch by the clock.

Then Barclay said, and he was speaking not just to Albert; "But Western Russian time, remember, is an hour earlier than Greenwich. It is *now*, by Western Russian time—" he watched the clock; we all did—"9:12."

At that precise instant *the Lutine Bell rang*.

Automatically we started forward to hear the announcement. What ship was dead? —Then, some suddenly, some gradually, clawing for crumbled footholds, we realized.

For there was no announcement, the wires weren't in yet. There was one of those listening silences, multiplied by fifty.

Conspicuous in his scarlet the Caller stood, open-mouthed, a dozen feet from his rostrum, staring up at the bell. High out of reach its lanyard hung straight down, without a quiver. No human hand had touched it.

*But that bell had rung*. Fifty men heard it. The air was still vibrating.

No one seemed more stunned than Barclay. He looked at me. "Did you expect—?"

"No!" I said, shaken.

"One hundred years to the second." He discovered, rather than pronounced, the words. —And waited.

Everyone waited, oddly idle, defenseless. A trench-coated die-hard re-examining the log. The nervous man in the plaid tie arguing fundamental

logic with a logic that had become, as of that moment, obsolete. But most of us, cautiously exposing our lungs to the cold-tasting air of a new dimension, simply huddled close together for the comfort of numbers, and the familiar smell of tobacco, and the reassuringly physical scratch of each other's tweed against our knuckles.

We were still standing, Barclay white now, biting hard on his pipe, when the news arrived.

The Russians had sunk the three-master. Beyond all doubt.

For the flimsies began flocking in like snow.

She had been sighted in the Riga vicinity but gone into the fog, then, emerging, had refused all warnings to stop or alter her course toward a military installation. Instead, openly, British colors flying, she had discharged two "atomic-vapor projectiles" into Soviet soil. But there had been no Soviet loss, and Soviet return fire at once cut the ship in two. Whatever secret weapon she carried lay now at the bottom of the ocean. A dud.

This was confirmed by the Installation Commander and an accidental eye-witness, a pilot flying over the area; and a politburo member came on the air to promise that the soil would be analysed in those two strangely empty ten-inch holes in the ground; for the western powers appeared to have devised some means of disintegrating their projectiles.

The incident, announced the Soviet Union in four languages, was ended.

The nervous man giggled nervously. Barclay had not moved; still white around the mouth, he re-focused his staring, shining eyes on twentieth century London and his own desk. He indicated the summarized report. "Netherton, what kind of mark would be left in the ground by the artillery Davis described?"

"A hundred-pound smooth ball

from one of those old muzzle-loaders should leave a hole about ten inches wide and deep, rounded at the bottom, as if by a bowl. —Two hits, two spouts of sand, he said."

"Two round ten-inch holes. —Empty," murmured Barclay dreamily.

"What does that mean?" asked a fat man shrilly. "Do you mean you think—"

"It means the Lutine Bell rang this morning for the sinking of a new ship on her maiden voyage; and to add to the tragedy, her report, without which her whole mission was wasted, took an even hundred years to reach us—due to an officer's loss of memory from exposure in the line of duty, and a mistake in filing by our Admiralty. Any ship would be frantic. —Well, it's cleared up at last, thank God. Lieutenant Davis and Mr. Albert Cater and I between us, far from starting the trouble, have probably averted a war. Give *that* to the press. Netherton."

There was an exclamation behind me and fat competent fingers snatched up the pamphlet. "Cancel, Netherton," said Waring stiffly, and tore it across; the mutilated pages drifted to the floor. "Barclay, you're losing grip, you're seeing mermaids. You'll have the papers coming out with *cartoons*—of *Lloyd's*—riding a broomstick over Russia!"

Then Barclay really reared up on his hind legs. "You're not protecting your pedigreed pug bitch from some coarse indignity, Waring! *Lloyd's* of London has survived long and honorably without the insult of *any* protection. But what does your mouse-mind know of the real *Lloyd's*, that traditional inviolate bulwark of the world for shipping *faith*? You, protect *Lloyd's*?"

Albert, with a glare of shocked disbelief, had shouldered Waring out of his way and rescued the fragile half-pages on the floor as if they were the desecrated ashes of Nelson; replacing them on the desk, with high reverence

he laid his—or somebody's—prize golden chrysanthemum over the little pile, and stood beside Barclay like a flaming torch. Here, I saw, in our own Albert, was that "younger historian" who would carry on after Barclay. It was to Albert that I replied reassuringly, "When a Ninth Wave rolls in right at our feet from the deeps of time itself, even Security recognizes new boundaries. The Admiralty does *not* cancel." There was more than a quorum of Hear-hears. "Only a completely ossified mind—" "That's me." It was the die-hard. "I address my question to Captain Barclay." He stood, pushing out the pockets of his trench coat, feet

planted wide apart; protesting, too belligerently, that he felt steady as a rock. "Do you ask me to believe that *two* British ships—"

"One ship," Barclay corrected him. "The *AGLAIA*."

"Okay, I accept your *AGLAIA* then in *her* time. But just explain this one *now*, that was sunk *today*! The damned Mystery Ship!"

Barclay fleetingly smiled. "The maverick three-master that's been twisting the British Lion's tail for the past month—" He spoke softly. "Not having any better name for the soul of the ship, we'll call that her ghost—shall we?"

## AGAIN AN EDITORIAL ASIDE

I would normally tell you here—as if you needed telling—who J. T. McIntosh is—who Randall Garrett is (*remember him at the Detention?*)—who James Rosenquest is—but to repeat this information seems hardly necessary.

Sam Moskowitz, historian and archivist of the field, author of *THE IMMORTAL STORM* and former Editor of *Science Fiction Plus*, likewise should need no introduction to any reader of science fiction.

The name of Howard Fast will bring back memories of other years.

Ivan T. Sanderson is of course the noted scientist and lecturer, author of several books including the recent *THE MONKEY KINGDOM*, whose earlier contributions to this magazine on Ufological matters aroused considerable interest. He has recently returned from driving almost up to the Arctic Circle, and is now finishing a fabulous book on the North American continent which Random House is to publish.

Dr. I. S. Shklovsky's statement on the possible origin of the Martian satellites is published here through the courtesy of the Press Department of the Embassy of the U.S.S.R. in Washington.

Mystery Writer Gladys Cluff contributes the following comments on her story, *THE LUTINE BELL*,—

The story is built on notes left by my late husband, Alfred Thomas Cluff, a west-coast maritime attorney before the war, during which he handled deep-sea collision-cases for the U.S. Government (War Shipping, and the Admiralty Section of the Department of Justice.) Technical material is his.

The *AGLAIA* was an actual ship as described, from Lloyd's Register of Shipping: a bark-rigged screw sloop of war with heavy armament for her time; seven-inch breech-loading rifles on pivots fore and aft, six 100-pound smooth bores broadside, and six-pounders on the quarter-deck. Three of these sloops were built and named for the Graces; the *AGLAIA* disappeared on her maiden voyage. All three were intended to sail but could steam as well; "they could have sunk Nelson's Victory just by standing off and hammering with their pivot rifles."

Now! Super TV Reception For Every Home And Apartment!

# Turns Your House Wiring Into A Giant TV Antenna!

An electronic miracle — first discovered in United States Radar Research! Called the MARK III RADAR ANTENNA, it actually increases your TV receiving area *Hundreds of Times!* Gives you *Movie-Sharp Reception* even on weak channels! Out-performs Rabbit Ear Antennas as much as three times — rivals the finest roof antennas made — *at One-Twentieth Their Cost!*

And yet, all you do is plug it in to an ordinary wall socket! It uses no electricity — costs you nothing to use — never heats up or wears out — works in absolutely safety! Once you slip it on your set, you never see it or touch it again! And yet it must give you the TV reception of your life — instantly — on every single channel in your area — **OR EVERY CENT OF YOUR MONEY BACK!**

## Why Settle for Half-Blurred Pictures! Washed-Out Channels!

Think of it! You probably paid \$200, \$300, even \$400 for your television set! You pay a TV repairman as much as \$20 and \$30 extra every year, just to keep that set in perfect working order! And yet, with all the miracles of television electronics . . . despite all the money that you spend on that set . . . **THAT TV SET IS ONLY AS GOOD — AND NO BETTER — THAN ITS TV ANTENNA!**

And what kind of antenna do you rely on to bring you in three to four hours of viewing pleasure every evening? If you're like millions of other Americans, especially in apartments, then you paid up to \$10 to \$15 for an "Indoors, Rabbit-Ears-Type Antenna" — **A WIRE ANTENNA ONLY TWO TO FOUR FEET LONG** — and you give it the almost-impossible job of pulling in clear, sharp, brilliant pictures, through concrete and steel, from hundreds of miles away! No wonder you're always jumping up to adjust it! No wonder your eyes are always tired and smarting at the end of a night's viewing!

Or, you have another choice! You can install a huge, fragile, roof antenna — and pay your landlord \$24 a year extra rent, or spend up to \$35 to put it in if you own your own house! And this roof antenna is three, four and five times as effective as any Rabbit Ears — because it has up to **TWENTY-FOUR FEET** of antenna wire — up to **TWENTY-FOUR FEET** OF RECEIVING AREA TO PULL IN YOUR PICTURES!

But these roof antennas are still too easy to bend out of focus — still too vulnerable to damage by wind or storm — still too expensive to repair!

After the first heavy storm — again you have the faded channels, muddy pictures, enjoyment cut in half!

But — and read these words carefully — there was always **A THIRD CHOICE FOR AN ANTENNA** — a TV Antenna lying hidden, already-made in your home or apartment! **A GIGANTIC TELEVISION ANTENNA** — not, two feet long or twenty feet long — **BUT HUNDREDS UPON HUNDREDS OF FEET LONG** — woven into the very structure of your apartment or home — and ready to pull in **SUPER-STRONG SIGNALS FROM EVERY DIRECTION!**

This tremendous potential antenna is the ordinary electrical wiring in your apartment or house! And all you need to put it to work — all you need to make it give you TV pictures so clear and so sharp that they are almost beyond belief — **IS SIXTY SECONDS OF YOUR TIME, AND ONE SIMPLE ELECTRONIC PART!**

## First Used to Guard America's Shores! Now it Brings you a Whole New World of TV Pleasure!

Yes! In one vital way, the ordinary electrical wiring in your home is exactly like a vast radar screen! These electrical circuits in your home have hundreds of feet of overlapping metal wire, spread out in every direction — exactly like radar! They automatically pick up radio and TV signals from every direction — exactly as radar picks up signals from as far as *six thousand miles away!*

But radar screens also have **HIGH-FREQUENCY RECEIVING ELEMENTS**, that collect these signals and channel them down into the control room, where they can be seen clear and sharp by the men who operate them! **WHY NOT USE THE**

**SAME TYPE HIGH-FREQUENCY RECEIVING ELEMENT TO TURN YOUR ORDINARY HOUSE WIRING INTO A SUPER TV ANTENNA!**

This is exactly what has happened in the *Mark III Radar Antenna!* Technically speaking, the *Mark III Antenna* is an *ultra-high-frequency* television antenna, utilizing radar-derived receiving elements, and reinforced by an additional dipole formation to provide the absolute maximum pulling power! It is designed and manufactured by engineers producing radar components for the United States Army, Navy and Air Force! It is a precision-made product of the highest quality possible! Yet its price is only \$4.95. Here is how this miracle antenna works! Here are the results you will get on any year, make or model set, **OR EVERY CENT OF YOUR MONEY BACK!**

## Your Family Must Gasp in Astonishment — Or your Full Money Back!

When you receive the *Mark III Radar Antenna*, you can then forget forever about Rabbit Ears, roof antennas, hourly adjustments or antenna repair bills! To install the *Mark III Antenna* on your set — forever — you need only *sixty seconds* of your time, and a screwdriver. There is no danger — you don't even dirty your hands!

Simply turn your set around; unscrew the present antenna wires and throw them away! Slip on the *Mark III* wires and plug in its cord. Now snap on your set, and turn to the weakest channel! Adjust the dipole elements till that "weak" channel comes in strong and clear, and then you are finished! That's all you have to do! Every other channel will automatically give you pictures of breathtaking beauty! You will have depth, contrast, sharpness, fidelity of sound that you have never dreamed possible before — **OR EVERY CENT OF YOUR MONEY BACK!**

You are the only Judge! It costs you nothing to try! Act **TODAY!**



## From The Frontiers Of The Space Age To You, The Mark III Radar Antenna!

Now! From the American Radar Science that sees pin-points on the Moon — comes TV reception so breathtaking that you can't believe your own eyes! Yes! A miracle of electronics that will outlast a hundred television sets — Improve the performance of them all! Read the thrilling details on this page. Try it at our risk — TODAY!



# EUGENE STEVENS INC.

**NOT FOR SALE IN THE STORES! ORDER TODAY!**

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31 West 47th Street, New York 36, N.Y.

Yes! Rush me your amazing new MARK III RADAR ANTENNA to try entirely at your risk! I will pay postman only \$4.95 plus COD postage and handling charges.

I understand that I may try this unit for one full week entirely at your risk! At the end of that time I must be amazed with the reception on every single channel in my area — or every cent of my money will be immediately refunded! I understand that a written and dated guarantee to this effect accompanies every package!

NAME .....

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☐ **SAVE MORE!** Enclose check, cash or money order and we pay all postage and handling charges! You save as much as 77¢. Same money-back guarantee, of course!



# UNIVERSE IN BOOKS

by Hans Stefan Santesson

Readers in these parts who saw the picture on the front page of the Sunday News for December 6th may have been slightly taken aback by Sam's expression as he peered out at the people surrounding him, hours after the destroyer Borie had picked him up two hundred miles out in the Atlantic. Our latest space traveler had returned home. One wondered what the monkey's thoughts were....

I had planned to publish, this month, articles by both James Taurasi and Ted E. White on the subject of the proposed Faircon in '64—I have Ted's article in front of me as I write this—but developments subsequent to the conference held in November by the Philadelphia Science Fiction Society made publication of both articles pointless.

At a meeting of the reconstituted Faircon Committee, on November 28th, 1959, attended by James V. Taurasi, Walter R. Cole, Belle C. Dietz, George Nims Raybin, this writer, and others, a motion was made and carried that the purpose of the Faircon Committee be "the running of a regional conference to be known as the Faircon, to be held over the July 4th weekend in 1964, in conjunction with" (*but not necessarily on the premise—Editor*) "the New York World's Fair and to celebrate the 25th Anniversary of the First World Science Fiction Convention". Officers elected included Belle C. Dietz who will serve as Chairman, James V. Taurasi and this writer serving as

Vice Chairmen. Forrest J. Ackerman, West Coast representative of the earlier Faircon Committee in formation was to be asked to continue as the Committee's representative, and George Nims Raybin will continue to serve as legal officer. There had been, as readers of *FU* are aware, considerable discussion in fandom subsequent to the formation of the original Committee under the Chairmanship of James Taurasi.

The Pittcon's Committee's plans for this Fall's 18th World Science Fiction Convention to be held at the Penn-Sheraton in Pittsburgh over Labor Day Weekend are increasingly interesting. I will personally welcome the opportunity to return to Pittsburgh, where I spent a long and rather hectic week speaking—more years ago than I care to remember and at the same time not so many years ago that I don't remember the friendliness and the hospitality of the Pittsburghers (and others in McKeesport and Duquesne) whom I met at the time. (*No—I wasn't talking about SF!*)

Dirce S. Archer, Chairman of the Convention Committee, writes that they will have the entire 17th floor for con activities, "and the PS is not a small hotel", and that a feature which may be of interest to some but which she thought I might not want to publicise (*Huh? Didn't she hear me second Washington's bid at the Detention?*) is the 45 foot bar in the Hospitality Room.

James Blish, winner of the 1959 "Hugo" award for his novel, the superb **A CASE OF CONSCIENCE**, will be Guest of Honor. Isaac Asimov, Sam Moskowitz and many others will be on the program.

May I make one suggestion?

Send in your membership *tonight*—\$2.00 in this country, \$1.00 if overseas—to PITTCON, c/o Dirce S. Archer, 1453 Barnsdale Street, Pittsburgh 17, Pa. Make your checks payable to P. Schuyler Miller, Treasurer, or 18th

World Science Fiction Convention Committee.

And plan **NOW** to meet the rest of us in Pittsburgh this Labor Day Weekend, September 3-4-5, 1960!

OK?

A final word to Rick Sneary and to other friends who have written me recently. A "Letters to the Editor" section—possibly a page, possibly longer—will appear beginning with the next issue.



## SCHOOL FOR SPACE SCIENTISTS

Space age school bells were ringing for some 400 leading military and civilian scientists invited to attend a new course at the USAF Aerospace Medical Center at Brooks AFB in Texas, this month. The scientists were to hear a five day series of lectures designed to bring them up to date on recent advances in space medicine. Among the subjects to be covered by leaders in their respective fields were: living in a space environment; radiation in space; propulsion systems; space flight dynamics; liveable space cabins; the selection and training of space crews, and lunar colonies.

The series of talks was entitled "Lectures in Aerospace Medicine." It was the first of its kind, according to Maj. Alfred R. Stumpe, M.D., Director of Education and Plans at the Center's School of Aviation Medicine here.

Among those invited were scientists and physicians from the Air Force, Army, Navy, National Aeronautics and Space Administration, Federal Aviation Agency, State Department, NATO, SEATO, Pan-American nations, the Aerospace Medical Association, and the Medical Education for National Defense group. The latter group includes approximately 125 deans and representatives from 71 medical schools in the U.S.

Research scientists from many major U.S. aircraft and missile companies were also invited, as were the Surgeons General of most of the countries in the free world.

# Now—Run Your Car Without Spark Plugs—

## Get Up to 31 More Horse-Power, 8 More Miles per Gallon USING ONLY REGULAR GAS!

Yes — this revolutionary new FIRE INJECTION SYSTEM — installed in 15 minutes, must deliver maximum power and economy WITHOUT CHANGING TO HIGH-PRICED PREMIUM GAS — must give you up to 31 more H.P., 8 more miles per gallon for the life of your car! See unprecedented GUARANTEE below!

Your car runs because gasoline is fed into the cylinders where a spark causes it to fire. Now here is the important thing. The larger this spark is the more powerful the explosion. The more powerful the explosion, the more power you get from a given amount of gas. Poor explosion means wasted gas, loss of power, poor getaway, bad starting, a sluggish car. Good explosion means more miles per gallon, more horsepower, blazing pickup; an exciting car to drive!

### WHAT CONTROLS ENGINE EFFICIENCY?

Spark plugs control the efficiency of that explosion. And not only do they give a small, weak spark to begin with; but they get worse every mile you drive. And that you can see



for yourself. Put a new set of spark plugs in your car and then look at them at 100 miles, at a thousand miles, at 5,000 miles. Every time you look you will see more filth and carbon and more of the precious electrode burning away,

### STOP USING SPARK PLUGS!

Now, read very carefully what I'm going to suggest . . . that you stop using spark plugs! That's right — get rid of them — forever. But . . . if you get rid of your spark plugs, what will ignite the gasoline and make the motor run?

Well, please remember that today you can have gas injection and get far more mileage, efficiency and power from less gas — and in a few years gas injection will have completely replaced the carburetor. In the same way, now is the time for Americans to replace old-fashioned, temporary, inefficient spark plugs with a modern, efficient, permanent fire injection system!

### PAYS FOR ITSELF IN ONE MONTH!

Now, the SA FIRE INJECTION system is so inexpensive that it can pay for itself in gas savings alone in one month of driving. Forget for the moment about the extra pep, power, performance . . . the savings in spark plug servicing and replacement . . . the savings in wear and tear on pistons and cylinders. Just remember this fire injection system will pay for itself in one month of driving! Here's how:

A spark plug jumps a spark across an air gap, limiting the size. A fire injector fires on the surface of a conductor. You get a heavy, powerful flame that will not blow out at pressures far greater than those created by the highest compression engine!

On ordinary spark plugs the air gap is always getting bigger, wasting power and gas. Plugs are constantly accumulating filth and carbon because of inefficient ignition. A fire injector has no air gap and no electrode to burn away. It never needs cleaning or setting; it actually becomes more efficient with use. It will actually outlast any car, delivering maximum efficiency without servicing or replacement.

With ordinary spark plugs you should be using premium gas, which costs from 4 to 8 cents more than regular gas. With fire injectors regular gas will give you up to 8 more miles per gallon, up to 31 more horsepower — plus easier starting in all weather.

These are some of the reasons that the U. S. Air Force pays premium prices for special aircraft fire injectors for the high-powered engines of their jet aircraft.

### PROVE IT TO YOURSELF!

If you have automatic transmission, make a note of how fast your car crawls forward when it is in the drive position, with the motor idling. If you have a sports car, a racing car or a boat, make a note of the RPMs as indicated on



the tachometer when the engine is idling. If you have regular transmission, put your car in low gear on a level road and notice its speed with the motor idling. Next, take a spark plug wrench (you can procure one of these tools anywhere) and remove your spark plugs. Just screw the injectors right into the spark plug openings. Then — no matter what kind of gas you have been using — fill your tank with the *poorest regular gas* you can buy. That's all you have to do to see the most amazing results you can imagine!

### CHECK YOUR RESULTS CAREFULLY

If you have a racing car, sports car or a boat, your RPMs will *increase up to 200 more at idling — up to 300 more at higher speeds*. If you have regular transmission, in low gear and with your motor idling *your car will move forward at from 4 to 6 miles per hour*; that means that the amount of gas that just kept your engine turning over will now carry you up to 6 miles at no cost to you!

If you have automatic transmission — now put your car in drive and let your engine idle. If your car stood still with spark plugs, *it will move for-*

*ward 4 to 6 miles per hour faster*. In other words, no matter what you drive, here is absolute proof that you can go further, faster and cheaper when you install SA FIRE INJECTORS in your car!

### SEND NO MONEY — JUST MAIL THE COUPON!

Up to now these SA FIRE INJECTORS were practically made by hand and would have had to sell for as high as \$5 each. But we knew that 30 or 40 dollars for a set of 6 to 8 SA FIRE INJECTORS was more than the average driver could afford — so we decided to get the price down so low that these injectors would pay for themselves 12 times, in one year of driving. So here is my astonishing proposition. If you will check your car's performance carefully before and after you install your SA FIRE INJECTORS and then tell your friends and neighbors about them, here is what I am prepared to do for you.

You can have a set of SA FIRE INJECTORS for the year and model of your car for a fraction of their value . . . that's \$1.49 each . . . only \$8.94 for a 6-cylinder car or \$11.92 for an 8-cylinder car. Now, if your SA FIRE INJECTORS don't meet my GUARANTEE — if they do not continue to deliver maximum performance for the life of your car . . . you get your money back on 10-day no-risk basis.

### CHECK THESE DIFFERENCES



#### SPARK PLUG

Fires across air gap  
Wire electrode burns away  
Carbon ruins firing tip  
Needs cleaning and setting  
Needs periodic replacing  
Needs premium gas  
Must have exact heat range  
Spark blows out under pressure



#### FIRE INJECTOR

NO air gap required  
NO wire electrode  
NO tip deterioration  
NO cleaning or setting ever  
NO replacing  
NO premium gas needed  
NO heat range  
NO blowing out even at highest compressions

#### GUARANTEE — INSURANCE — INDEMNITY

Take your set of SA FIRE INJECTORS and install them immediately; then, give your new injection system every test you can think of . . . starting — acceleration — gas mileage — motor pep and smoothness for 10 full days. You must get up to 31 more horsepower — up to 8 more miles per gallon — increased engine RPMs — faster starting, blazing acceleration, freedom from knocks and pings, easier starting in all kinds of weather. . . AND DO ALL OF THESE THINGS ON REGULAR GAS, OR YOU GET YOUR MONEY BACK.

As long as the SA FIRE INJECTORS are in your car you are covered by a PRODUCT LIABILITY INSURANCE POLICY, endorsed by an internationally famous insurance company. A detailed description of this coverage is yours on request.

If any SA FIRE INJECTOR does not continue to deliver maximum performance for the life of your car, we will replace it FREE, or we will replace your ignition system with a set of brand-new standard American plugs. Simply return your SA FIRE INJECTORS with your guarantee.

C. D. Koshor, President,  
STERLING ARTCO, INC.

Ladies and gentlemen, I'm all through. If you're not too lazy to take 15 minutes to remove a set of plugs and install a set of fire injectors and not too proud to save a lot of money — if you enjoy a car that delivers the maximum in smooth, powerful performance — then choose the method of ordering easiest for you as shown in the coupon and order your SA FIRE INJECTORS right now!

Sterling Artco, Inc., 31 West 47th St., New York 36, N.Y. Dept. GAF-2

Yes, I want new pep, power and performance from my automobile! Please send me:

- ☐ One matched set of 6 SA FIRE INJECTORS for \$8.94  
☐ One matched set of 8 SA FIRE INJECTORS for \$11.92  
☐ Single SA FIRE INJECTORS (Number . . . . .) at \$1.49 each

☐ Enclosed is the full price for the SA FIRE INJECTORS I am ordering. You will pay the postage. In addition, I will receive as a special FREE Bonus a famous illustrated 62-page "Economy Driving Handbook." Though I pay in advance, all terms of this offer and Guarantee-Insurance-Indemnity apply, and the Handbook is mine to keep even if I return the Fire Injectors.

#### CAR DATA

YEAR . . . . .  
 MAKE . . . . .  
 # CYS. . . . .  
 MODEL . . . . .

☐ Send my SA FIRE INJECTORS C.O.D. on your 10-day money-back guarantee. I will pay for the postage and C.O.D. charges.

NAME . . . . . Remittance enclosed:  
 ADDRESS . . . . . ☐ Check  
 CITY . . . . . ZONE . . . . . STATE . . . . . ☐ M.O.  
☐ Cash

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# ROPE

by JAMES ROSENQUEST

*Man is a rope...over an abyss.*

—Nietsche

MAXIM BORTOFF'S eyes widened in terror.

Down at the end of the long corridor a massive door opened with metallic cries and groans. Once again he thought: *If only they would oil those hinges. I would have less time to think.* Less time to think of what might be in store for him that day. Less time to remember what they had done to him the day before.

Then, down the long corridor, the sound of approaching footsteps. Two pairs of feet. One pair, heavy and hobnailed; the other pair, in a contrapuntal rhythm of terror, the precise, almost mincing *click-click* of Yezhov's leather heels.

He leaned forward on his cot and clutched his head in sweating hands. *How appropriate*, he thought wildly, *that Yezhov should bear the same name as the infamous inquisitor of the early twentieth century.* But this Yezhov would have suavely denied any similarity in function. He was a high member of the *Gospolnauk*, the government agency scientific research. A nice, high-sounding title

for a ruthless research for new techniques that could be ruthlessly applied.

His thoughts broke off as the steps halted at another cell somewhere between the far-off door and his own barred chamber. Perhaps it was not his day! Perhaps they were going to take some other subject for experimentation. He prayed that it might be so, to a God his society had long ago abolished. In the same thought he despised himself for wishing his sufferings off onto a fellow creature.

There was a muttering of conversation in front of that other, distant cage, then the footsteps resumed. *Oh no*, he thought desperately, *not so soon again.* The terror rushed back with a surge, and he tried to push it back out of his consciousness. But the fear had long since ceased to be something of the mind only. It was a knife deep in his viscera, twisting and turning as the mingled steps grew louder.

He tried to summon up the dregs of pride and dignity, to face his tormentors like a man. But he knew he would be betrayed by the shine on his thin face, by the tiny beads of sweat forming at the hair line and creeping down his forehead, by the twitching muscle

in his left cheek. He stood up, trembling, and wiped his palms against the long gray sack they had given him to wear. Once, he had tried to tear it into strips with which to hang himself, but the tough synthetic fabric yielded not one thread to his weakened muscles.

The footsteps stopped.

With a gigantic effort of will, Maxim lifted his head, drew a deep shuddering breath, and looked toward the padded door. (They thought of everything, he had realized dully—how many weeks ago? They would not even let him try to dash his brains out against the hardness of a wall or door.) Through the small grill near the top of the door, a pair of dark, intense eyes regarded him with clinical interest. Then they turned aside to look at the invisible companion, and Maxim heard a softly spoken command. Deceptively soft, like everything else about Yezhov. The old and practiced pose of the man who had power and knew it. The assumed gentleness, the velvet glove concealing the iron hand. The bland mask of sadism, the perversion of cruelty hiding behind the antiseptic skirts of science.

The padded door opened.

Yezhov stood outside, his big, grey-thatched head tilted carelessly to one side. The penetrating eyes looked Maxim up and down thoughtfully, a Gioconda smile quirking the thin lips. Nothing but the eyes distinguished that face, but he knew it well. It hovered close to him in the laboratory, observing his twisted face, listening to his choked groans, watching the instruments attached to his scalp, chest, wrists, diaphragm. Instruments attached by wires that drew his agony from him and recorded it on dispassionate drums; endless jagged lines of ink on graph paper were the signature of pain.

Yes. He knew that face well. No twisted lips here; no cruel, beaked nose; nothing like the imaginary stereotype of the inquisitor. Just a stub-nosed, high-cheeked, broad, peasant's

face. But he had seen it often in his nightmares, too, in almost photographic detail, bland and amiable, eyebrows slightly raised in surprise at his screams of fear and hate.

"Good morning, *gospodin*," the gentle voice said. The oblique mode of greeting was not lost by the prisoner. Yezhov never called him *tovarich* or *grazhdanin*—"comrade" or "citizen." It was always *Gospodin* Bortoff—"Mister" Bortoff—with the veiled sarcasm reserved for foreigners and enemies of the state.

Maxim had tried to escape beyond the Venus version of the Iron Curtain, and thus placed himself outside the mercy or the protection of the classless state. True, the state still needed "corrective" labor battalions, even more so on Venus, where the unending cold war had been transplanted from Earth, and where the free world struggled against the omnipotent state for the rapid development of the shrouded planet.

But Maxim Bortoff was too intelligent for the chains of the hard labor gangs, for the steaming yellow muck of the vast Venusian swamps where a new Czar was attempting to erect a new Petrograd. No, he was much too intelligent to have his life wasted in a few short years of killing labor in the super-heated and humid atmosphere of the Lenin Development. And so the state, in a five minute trial devoted to denunciation without defense, had turned him over to the conditioning experiments of Yezhov's projects.

"Good morning, *gospodin*," the soft voice repeated, but the prisoner remained mute, forcing himself to stand erect and still. He suppressed an impulse to wipe his sticky palms again, but he could not control the twitching facial muscle. Two beads of sweat merged, and a drop trickled down his forehead with agonizing slowness. *Damn him*, he thought despairingly, *I'm afraid and he knows it...he knows it*. The brain wanted to be

brave and dignified, but the body, with vast eons of genetic survival remembered by every cell and every organ, blindly urged him to attack or flee...attack or flee.

There was no road of escape.

There was no mode of attack.

The first week of his confinement in the padded chamber, in an excess of unseeing, unthinking animal fear, he had bowled over Yezhov and assaulted the burly guard. The brute-faced guard, with a grunt of surprise rather than pain, had merely absorbed his frenzied blows, then neatly twisted his arm behind his back and applied pressure on his thumb until he screamed. Yezhov, pursing his lips in disapproval, had motioned to the guard, and the pressure had been lessened. But he never tried escape again.

His body jerked involuntarily as Yezhov snapped his fingers. Two hundred and fifty pounds of eager sadism entered the cell and stamped toward Maxim with booted feet.

"Good morning, comrade doctor," he stammered hastily, and moved forward slowly. "Please," he pleaded, despising himself for the abjectness of his voice. "Please. Don't let him touch me. I'll go with you quietly."

Yezhov gestured to the guard, who stopped and scowled in disappointment. *You dirty pig*, Maxim said silently, sub-vocally, *you'd like me to put up a struggle, wouldn't you?*

"Good," Yezhov smiled, revealing a rare gold tooth—one of the signs, as it had been for several generations, of a member of the ruling class in the classless state. He snapped his fingers again, motioned to the doorway.

"You will proceed first. Alexei and I will follow close behind. I think," he smiled amiably, "that you know the way to the laboratory by now. You also know—need I add?—that there are no avenues of escape."

Maxim's shoulders drooped despairingly, and he shuffled forward between the guard and the doctor. They fell in behind him, and he walked un-

steadily down the long, dim corridor. He heard a brief laugh behind him, and realized that the guard had observed how his legs trembled as he set them down, step after reluctant step.

At the massive door to the cell-row, they paused while the guard drew a magnetized sliver of notched steel and inserted it in a minute slit in the center of the door. It swung open on shrill hinges, and Maxim shuddered. Yezhov noticed his reaction, and there was a glint of amusement in his dark eyes.

"Ah yes," he murmured casually, as if to an entering guest, "we must substitute something non-metallic for those hinges. Most unfortunately, there is air-conditioning only on one side of the door." He wrinkled his nose in distaste as a rank and humid gust of cell-block air puffed past them. "The corrosive atmosphere of this planet," he continued didactically, "has a greedy affinity for metals."

On the other side of the door, the side that Maxim had come to dread, Yezhov motioned courteously to him to proceed to the right. He hesitated, and the huge guard put one hand in the small of his back and shoved. It came without warning, and he realized how weak his knees were as he went sprawling to the floor. A second guard, seated to one side of the door, looked up briefly from his state-approved and state-printed copy of *Interplanetary Dialectics*, and snickered. Yezhov frowned disapprovingly.

"Patience, patience, Alexei." He wagged a finger at the guard. "How many times must I remind you that this is a scientific research center, not a prison." He sighed and murmured to himself. "They *will* send me these former prison guards from Earth."

Maxim picked himself up shakily, and the three men continued toward their destination in the west wing of the low, sprawling structure. Fluorescent lights provided heatless illumination, and air-conditioning vents



in the ceiling breathed out cool, dry air that rapidly drew the moisture from his damp, tangled hair, and helped to banish the stickiness from his palms. But his stomach still churned and his heart pounded rapidly. Once, as a child, he had held an injured bird in his hands and felt its fiercely rapid heart-beat, more like a continuous pulsation than a succession of discrete thumps. It seemed now that the frightened creature was huddled behind his rib box, fluttering with terror.

Maxim felt the blood drain from his face.

They had rounded another corner, and there was the laboratory before him. The long porcelain table with the recording instruments crouching eagerly. The heavy oak chair, bolted to the floor, waiting to embrace him, waiting to pinion him with sweat-stained straps. He stumbled over the threshold, his arms and legs turned to wax.

*What will it be this time?* he wondered dully, almost depersonalized, as if it were going to happen to someone else. *What will it be today? The dolorimeter, with its invisible beams of infrared rays playing on black-painted spots on his body? Or would it be high voltage currents applied to sensory nerve tracts?* He wanted to shriek to his tormentor not to do those things again, but realized that he preferred the devil known to the devil unknown.

It seemed to Maxim that he had paused in the doorway only a brief moment while the anguished thoughts raced through his mind. But the guard had seized his arms from behind and was now propelling him—for he had no strength or will of his own—toward the waiting chair. Yezhov followed behind anxiously, almost solicitously. Then Maxim heard a quick, sharp intake of breath. His eyes looked apathetically at Yezhov, then followed the latter's surprised gaze toward the far corner of the labora-

tory. The guard looked up, too, and suddenly relaxed his crushing grip. Thus unexpectedly released, Maxim lurched weakly forward a few steps and collapsed gratefully on a porcelainized bench placed against the nearest wall. With the faintest glimmer of interest, he surveyed the newcomer at the other end of the room.

The visitor arose gracefully from his chair, while Yezhov and Alexei seemed frozen in positions of military attention. He could see, too, that sundry technicians and a white-garbed female nurse were standing at their instrument-cluttered benches in respectful silence.

Maxim closed his eyes wearily. *Another and better—or worse—inquisitor?* he wondered gloomily. *Some new scientist from Earth, with better techniques?* Then Yezhov spoke, and Maxim's eyes snapped open again at the flustered tone of respect.

"Welcome, comrade commissar," he exclaimed eagerly. "Welcome to Gospolnauk, Venus. I was not informed of your coming, or of your arrival here. Needless to say," Yezhov continued apologetically, "we would have prepared a suitable reception."

"Of course." The visitor lit a long cigarette, drew deeply, and exhaled, speaking through a fragrant cloud of smoke. A vent drew long, tenuous streamers in Maxim's direction, and he sniffed hungrily at the fragrance of almost-forgotten terrestrial tobacco. The commissar advanced to within a few feet and stared down at him with amused curiosity. Over the left breast of his severely simple, black uniform gleamed a silver hammer-and-sickle, enclosed by a ring of small stars.

"I did not want nor expect a lavish reception," the newcomer continued absently as he studied the prisoner. "In any case, the Central Committee does not announce in advance the comings and goings of its deputies. And banquets are not justified on a

new planet where good food is a luxury. Do you realize the sacrifices made in the mother country to keep the Venus colonies flourishing?"

"Of course, Comrade Grushenko," replied Yezhov hurriedly. "It is just that we would have—"

Grushenko waved his hand. "Who is this man?" he queried abruptly, stabbing his long cigarette in Maxim's direction. "One of your Pavlovian dogs?"

"His name is Maxim Bortoff, comrade commissar." Yezhov changed the subject with relief. "He is the latest subject of our forcing techniques, in which we use scientifically applied pain."

"Ah yes, pain." Grushenko smirked knowingly. "Judiciously applied, it can produce answers." The smile vanished from his thin, pallid features. "May I inquire what answers you expect to get from this subject?" There was a sharpness in his tone that aroused a faint glimmer of unreasoning hope in the man on the bench. Could it be that the visitor from Earth disapproved? Maxim looked up at the elegant, black-clad form with hopeful eyes.

Yezhov frowned slightly, and seemed at a loss for words. "Sir, we are not looking for answers to political questions. It is something quite different."

"Indeed?" Grushenko arched one eyebrow quizzically.

"Yes, comrade." Yezhov's voice grew firmer as he plunged into his subject. "We are, in a word, attempting to force mental growth."

Grushenko flicked ash from his long cigarette, and stared reflectively at the glowing end. He spoke softly, almost to himself. "Mental growth? My dear comrade doctor, I myself am a physician, specializing in neurology. Pain is inhibiting. Since when has it encouraged intellectual development?"

"We are using a combined technique," Yezhov continued doggedly.

"As comrade commissar well knows, there are several psychic energizers in existence today, descendants and offshoots of iproniazid, which stimulate the higher cerebral functions."

"This man Bortoff, although an enemy of the state, possesses an unusually high intelligence quotient, so we find him ideal for our experiments. Naturally, we first extracted all available information as to his political views, and as to any friends or relatives who entertain similar ideas inimical to the people's interplanetary union."

"Naturally." Grushenko looked at Maxim through half-closed eyes. He dropped the cigarette to the floor, and very slowly and deliberately crushed out the glowing ember with his foot. "But if this man is of such high intelligence, why has he not been quickly re-conditioned into a useful tool of the state?"

"He shall, he shall," Yezhov answered hurriedly, wiping his brow. "His brain shall certainly be salvaged for useful tasks. Meanwhile, we are attempting to determine the upper limit of those tasks." He walked to the long table in front of the chair so terribly familiar to Maxim, and pointed to an apparatus of tubes and lenses.

"Comrade commissar will note this device. It is called a dolorimeter, and was first used by the Americans in the middle of the twentieth century to measure gradations in pain."

The tall, black-clad man frowned slightly.

"Naturally," Yezhov continued hastily, "our own scientists improved on it greatly, so that it is practically a completely new instrument, highly simplified and most useful."

"Naturally." Grushenko shrugged indifferently and lit another cigarette. "Please continue, but be brief."

Yezhov wiped his forehead again. "Of course. Of course. The device emits pure infrared radiation of any desired intensity, which can be focused on a given part of the subject's

body. The spot is painted black for more complete absorption of the heat rays.

"Now, the early experimenters with pain found that the sensation could be broken down into twenty-one fairly distinct steps. They consolidated these steps in twos to make a scale ranging from zero to ten and one-half *dols*, or units of pain. We, on the other hand, have multiplied by five to produce approximately one hundred degrees, making computations possible on a percentage basis."

"And what," Grushenko broke in impatiently, blowing smoke through his thin nostrils, "have you accomplished with your improved instrument and scale?"

"We have been testing the subject's ability to think clearly under intense pain," Yezhov hurried on. "This could be a quality of great value to the people's state. In addition, we have been attempting to force the subject to use his cerebral capacity to the utmost. We have first given the subject a powerful psychic energizer, then, little by little, raised the dolorimeter to the hundredth degree, or ten and one-half *dols*, a level of pain reached only in some cases of childbirth. Despite popular conceptions, there is an upper limit to pain, beyond which one cannot go. Crude torture, which involves the emotional complications produced by seeing one's own blood and shattered limbs, really does not go beyond the neater effects produced by the dolorimeter." Yezhov began walking back and forth as he warmed to his subject.

"And so, urged on by the pain, and supported by the euphoric drugs, the subject has solved, mentally, progressively more complex tasks."

Maxim cautiously felt the raw, tender spots on his arms and the ugly, broken blister on his forehead. Oh yes, he solved their problems. He had been a mathematician before he fell afoul of the state, and had attempted to flee to the free world's settlement.

The last problem they had given him, yesterday, was one in calculus, an integration. As the needle on the scale rose higher and higher, they had urged him to solve the equation, promising relief when he gave the correct answer. His brain had seemed aflame, and the images wavered in his mind's eye. And then suddenly there was a clarity that matched the pain in intensity—a pain so out of proportion to the small circle on his forehead. The answer sprang full-fledged into his mind, as Kekule reported having seen the famous benzene ring in a burst of illumination two centuries ago.

He was dimly aware of Yezhov's precise voice, then Grushenko's imperious tone broke in, wrenching his mind back to the present. The commissar had seated himself on a laboratory stool, arms folded, and was staring curiously at him.

"Very interesting. But what started you on this line of investigation?"

Yezhov hesitated, then plunged on. "There was a book written by a man named Heard, in the nineteen-thirties, I believe, in which he voiced unusual opinions about the nature of both sex and pain in human evolution. Naturally, we could not waste a subject's lifetime in experimental sex sublimation, so we decided to concentrate on pain for quicker results.

"This writer maintained that pain was a raw, evolutionary force. He pointed out that both sensitivity and intensity of pain seemed greater in higher types of men. He remarked, of course, how certain ascetics—I believe they called them yogis—tried to raise the level of consciousness through self-inflicted pain. But their methods were too crude, and the psychic energy released was too great to be controlled and directed. However, they did not have the chemical agents we have today, chemicals which increase mental energy.

"It has also been a commonplace in psychology for over a century that

man uses only a fraction of his potential brain power. It is this potential that we have been trying to raise in the subject." Yezhov paused and drew a deep breath. "That, comrade commissar, is the gist of our experiments."

Grushenko, quite suddenly, threw back his head and laughed. Yezhov's shocked expression seemed only to amuse him more. The laugh stopped as abruptly as it had begun, and the commissar stood up, a frown creasing his brow. He jabbed his cigarette viciously toward Yezhov.

"Comrade," he said in icy tones, "I could almost find you guilty of bourgeois mysticism. You base your experiments on the ramblings of a twentieth century anglo-saxon mystic, and prate vaguely of unused potentialities—that old cliché of vitalists and fuzzy-brained religionists of a bygone century." Yezhov looked stunned, and his face turned white as the voice rose in anger.

"Return to Pavlov, return to the materialistic bases! There is only inhibition and excitation, nothing more. And the so-called unused portions of the brain are only excess tissue, a safety factor typically supplied by what the bourgeois personify as 'nature.' One might think, comrade doctor," he sneered, "that you had been educated in the hormic philosophy of MacDougall and Driesch."

Yezhov stood with head bowed and shoulders sagging under the tirade. Then Grushenko approached him and slapped him on the shoulder. "Come now," he said almost good-naturedly, "I do not intend to report you to the central science committee for deviationism. I do, however, require your assistance in an urgent experiment of my own." He glanced with narrowed eyes in Maxim's direction. "Your highly intelligent guinea pig will do admirably."

Maxim's hope died then, and with it he died a little death. So there would be no relief from the experiments af-

ter all. He looked away apathetically as the bulky figure of the guard came closer and stood glowering over him, cutting off any thoughts of a futile dash to the door. He stared through a haze of fatigue as the commissar drew Yezhov off to one side and talked in low but earnest tones. Then there were instructions to three men, apparently his assistants, who left the laboratory and returned shortly, wheeling in some kind of heavy machine with a large, glass screen resembling a radarscope.

Maxim, half listening, half occupied with his own thoughts—thoughts racing round and round like rats on a wheel—heard snatches of conversation between the two men, while laboratory assistants scuttled about on mysterious tasks.

"...have a fully equipped operating room? I will need..."

And—

"...yes, yes, comrade Grushenko. We will prepare him at once..."

His heart began to leap again, pounding in double time, as if it would leap through his chest, and the stiletto of panic twisted in his stomach.

The white-clad female nurse was approaching with a hypodermic.

The blind animal urge returned again, and he lurched to his feet, his wild eyes darting frantically toward the doorway. The guard stepped forward and drove home a heavy fist to his solar plexus. He gasped, doubled up, and fell back to the bench. Yezhov snapped an angry command, and the red-faced guard, breathing heavily, stepped back reluctantly.

Yezhov and Grushenko stood over him. He looked up at them through a haze of pain, and realized that, more than the eager gleam in his old tormentor's dark eyes, he dreaded the heavy-lidded, dispassionate stare of the visitor. He was vaguely aware that the nurse was rolling back the sleeve of his garment. Then a coolness on his arm, and the pungent odor of anti-

septic. And finally the sharp bite of the needle and the dull ache as it plunged through skin and underlying muscle. A soothing haze settled over him, deepening through shades of gray to velvety blackness.

He slept.

*The more mentally active one is, the less he is capable of pain. The aim must be not to get rid of pain, but to achieve a new quality and intensity of awareness...*

—G. F. Heard

In the small but well-equipped operating room, in a glareless pool of polarized light, Yezhov and Grushenko stood over the table, now white-gowned, capped and masked. Yezhov watched entranced, as, guided by three-dimensional roentgen-grams of the victim, his superior delicately guided fine wires through a one-inch hole in the occipital region. Then followed two shiny metallic capsules, the size of peas, to which the other ends of the filaments were attached.

Grushenko stepped back, surveyed his handiwork, and sighed. The two-hour operation was complete. He removed his mask and motioned to a subordinate to finish the minor task of closing the cavity and suturing the scalp back in place. He left the operating room, trailed by Yezhov. Divesting themselves of their surgical gowns, they walked down a corridor, entered Yezhov's lavishly furnished private cubicle, and closed the door.

Grushenko lit a long cigarette, seated himself in a leather chair, and smoked in reflective silence. Yezhov restrained his impatient curiosity as long as he could, then ventured timidly: "If Comrade Grushenko would care to explain the nature of this operation?"

Grushenko looked up. "What? Oh yes. Of course. I forget that you are not a neurologist." He leaned back and blew a perfect smoke ring.

"Well. To begin. It is well known

that specific mental and physical functions correspond with more or less definite regions of the brain. True, integrating areas and accessory clusters of neurones complicate the picture and make for ill-defined boundaries. Nevertheless, materialistic neurology tells us that every function, every thought, must be associated with a group or chain of neurones. The basis of all thinking is physical. So it is and so it must be.

"But neurologists began to realize, toward the middle of the twentieth century, that feeling-tone must also be localized. It was found that the brain does have definite loci of pleasure and pain, and these were mapped out."

The commissar viewed Yezhov through a cloud of smoke. "You follow me thus far?"

"Of course, Comrade Grushenko." Yezhov's eyes narrowed. "I begin to see the light."

"To be sure. Now, these loci of pain and pleasure were finally mapped out in the reticular areas of the mid-brain, and with such precision that animals could be subjected to controlled experiment.

"A fine wire could be inserted into the pleasure center of the animal, and a minute electric stimulus be applied. A small treadle was placed in the animal's cage, providing a voluntary switch. By accident, the creature soon found that stepping on the treadle was rewarded by a wave of what must have been intense pleasure.

"The strongest reward, or pleasure, came from stimulation of areas of the hypothalamus and certain mid-brain nuclei—regions which were centers for control of digestive, sexual, and other processes. Animals with electrodes in these areas would stimulate themselves up to five thousand times an hour, the frequency apparently being limited only by the resting periods of the nerve fibers involved.

"Electric stimulation of these regions actually seemed to be more re-

warding to the animals than real food. Hungry rats, for example, ran faster to reach the treadle than they did to reach food. Indeed, a hungry animal often ignored its favorite food in favor of the synthetic pleasure of stimulating itself electrically.

"The experiments were finally extended with success to monkeys, and then"—Grushenko stood up suddenly, a gleam of fanaticism in his eyes—"to the highest primate: man. We have experimented in our terrestrial laboratories with enemies of the state, producing the purest pleasure or pain at will. You see?"

"Of course," Yezhov murmured. "The perfect method of conditioning! The ultimate in Pavlovian technique. Allow me to congratulate you, comrade. This achievement is enormous."

Grushenko methodically ground out his cigarette in an ash tray. "Thank you," he smiled. "Although the achievement is not entirely mine. The electronics group of the central science committee developed the remote-control and signalling power packs which you saw me insert in the subject's cranium."

Yezhov's jaw dropped. "Remote control, comrade?"

"Naturally," Grushenko gestured grandly. "The ultimate achievement in individual control! To be sure, so far the range of the receiving and sending capsules is only fifty miles. But for the present that is sufficient for our purposes."

"To be sure," Yezhov murmured, uncomprehending. Grushenko sat down opposite him and tapped him confidentially on the knee.

"How far away is the western world's settlement?"

"About forty miles."

"Leaving ten miles for the interior radius of the colony. Question number two! What distinguished visitor from the Earth, his country still uncommitted to the ideological struggle,

is due to land at the enemy's spaceport in two weeks?"

"Why, Pandit Gombaria of the Indian Federation." Yezhov's eyes widened.

"Just so." Grushenko nodded and smiled. "Final question: What would be the reaction of the Indian Federation if some man in the welcoming crowd should shoot the Pandit? Of course, some enraged bystander would in turn kill the foul assassin, and on the body would be found papers identifying him as a West European. What then, my dear Yezhov?"

"Of course," breathed Yezhov.

"We have the perfect instrument at hand," the commissar continued triumphantly. "His every action is controllable from a distance. His obedience will be rewarded by intense pleasure. His failure or defiance, by inescapable pain. Short of absolute unconsciousness or death, he cannot avoid our far-flung commands."

He threw back his head and laughed.

"Behold Maxim Bortoff, the Automatic Man!"

Maxim Bortoff stood uneasily at the northern outskirts of Venusberg.

Where his own earlier efforts had failed, he now stood at the door of freedom by Grushenko's design.

But the terrible irony was, that he was not free. They had explained that to him very carefully, with words. With words—and with demonstrations.

Thirty-five miles away from the hated people's settlement, and thirty-five miles from the dreaded laboratories of Yezhov, he was still their prisoner. Prisoner, and agent too, assigned to a loathsome task. To be an assassin, not through principle or fanaticism or even personal gain, but through a degrading compulsion from within, through a surgical-electronic control that made him half

man, half machine—that was the horror of it.

A chill touched his spine as he peered vainly back in the direction from which he had come, but his two silent escorts had vanished into the hot, humid, Venusian night. The high, unbroken cloud barrier, the eternal white shroud that veiled the planet's surface from terrestrial telescopes, let through no gleam of starlight. Blackness lay behind him, covering up the long, slogging route through riotous plant growth and over steaming, quaking bog-land.

Ahead gleamed the lights of Venusberg, the sprawling, growing town started two decades ago by the free nations of Earth. A small piece of each of some dozen nations—those that could afford the cost of transporting men and materials to another planet. Thanks to Heisenberg's unified field theory in 1958, anti-gravity had at last replaced chemical propellants a century later, but the energy consumption was enormous.

Maxim pumped will power into his aching legs and trudged on toward the friendly lights—the goal he had sought so eagerly long weeks ago—the goal that now held dread for him. The state had infallible ways of twisting or crushing aspirations that were not in accord with its needs.

They had prepared him thoroughly for his mission. During the two weeks of recuperation from the operation, he had been pampered like the highest favorite of the classless society. The best of food, daily injections of vitamins and hormones and analeptics, and spaced periods of carefully supervised exercise. And the spaced demonstrations of their control over him. By twisting a knob, they had suffused his body with sheer pleasure.

"This is your reward for faithful service," they smiled.

A slight turn of another knob, and he was racked with agony, greater, they explained, than the withdrawal

agony of old-time drug addicts.

"That is your punishment for disobedience," they threatened.

They had primed his mind with information needed to get about in the enemy's colony. Like all of the professional class, he spoke excellent English; like most of them, he also knew Interlingua. His pockets contained the bills and coins of the free world settlement, and papers showing he was a citizen of the West European Union. And they had given him the location of a small hotel—his contact. Their agents were everywhere. They took pains to impress that on him.

His numbed feet felt a sudden change in the firmness of the ground, and he realized he was now on concrete. He shuffled forward between dark walls of an alley, became bolder as street light moved to meet him. He started as something ran across his path: a rat. Man's ancient, furtive competitor had managed to find its way even to a new planet, hiding in some cargo.

He hesitated as he emerged from the alley into the lights of the street. At this late hour there were still strollers, mostly space-crews, in all stages of intoxication, looking for another tavern or one of the two hundred women of convenience imported by the provisional government.

Maxim cast a furtive glance at his reflection in a darkened store window, and saw an average-looking man with a strong, plain face and dark black hair, dressed in cheap clothes that marked him as a grease-monkey from the spaceport, or perhaps a low-grade clerical worker. Nothing to indicate him to any passerby as an enemy from the other camp.

Drawing a deep breath, he walked casually across the street and entered the lobby of the Old World Hotel.

Grushenko, seated at the console of dials at the base of the giant screen, looked at his watch. "Our

robot should be there by now," he said to Yezhov, laughing briefly. He motioned his aide to step forward. "Observe." He threw a small switch, and a tiny red light appeared in the center of the screen. "Perfect reception," he murmured with satisfaction, and turned a dial. The dot moved to the top of the screen, paused briefly, and crept a fraction of a centimeter downward.

"That is Bortoff?" Yezhov wondered aloud.

"Quite so. His position at the top of the screen corresponds with his position now in or near the hotel designated. At the bottom of the screen is the location of the spaceport, due south, where he has his rendezvous with destiny. Each square on the grid corresponds approximately with one block in Venusberg. A straight line down the center leads directly from the hotel to the port. As he moves, so moves the light. Any excursions into side streets, or any attempt to double back from the station at the spaceport, will be immediately visible to us."

Yezhov smiled thinly. "And, of course, any deviation from the assigned path tomorrow will be met by corrective measures."

"Of course." Grushenko leaned back in his chair and stretched contentedly like a great black cat. "Naturally, he will also have a companion when he sets out on his mission. We shall also receive reports from a movable short-wave transmitter. We who are trained for the central committee overlook nothing!" He looked up at Yezhov's admiring face and smiled. "You find it strange that an outstanding surgeon should also play the part of special agent. But there are no arbitrary, fixed lines in the inner circle of the party. We do what we are assigned."

He pointed to two dials at the right of the console. "Those two dials, comrades, replace the so-called free will of our emissary. The green dial provides

his reward; the red one will punish him for failure or disobedience." He lit a cigarette, inhaled with satisfaction, and closed his eyes.

"In any case," he mused, "after the arrival of the Pandit tomorrow, he will be beyond pain and pleasure..."

Maxim stepped through the revolving door.

Inside, the sticky heat of the Venusian night was replaced by a blast of cool, dry air. Even in this second-rate hotel, he wondered, they had air-conditioning. He walked across the dingy carpeting and stood before the desk. The clerk turned around. Maxim dried his palms nervously against his trousers and wet his lips.

"I would like a room," he said in a low voice. To himself: *I wonder if my English is good enough. He might detect a slight accent.* The clerk smiled and shrugged his shoulders. Maxim switched to Interlingua and repeated his request.

"Of course. Sorry, sir, but I do not speak English. Myself, I am from France." He turned the registry book around and slid it across the desk to Maxim. "Does the gentleman desire a room with bath?" Maxim nodded assent, and signed the book with slightly trembling fingers. He caught himself as he began to write in his native Slavic script, and signed his new name in carefully formed roman letters: "Max Braun."

The clerk handed him his key. Room 202 on the second floor.

"If the gentleman would like cooling refreshment, there is an adequate bar through the door on the far right."

Maxim looked up, startled. "What? Oh yes, a drink might be nice at that." He strolled casually toward the entrance to the bar, trying to look natural, but the uneasiness was a gnawing thing at the base of his skull. As he walked across the lobby, he glanced anxiously from the corners of his eyes.



A lanky blond man in space-crew uniform, sitting in a leatherette easy chair, reading a newspaper. *Perhaps he is one of them.* He realized he should have thought "one of us," with a shock of despair, understanding for the first time his status as an outcast between two worlds, excommunicated by one and not acceptable by the other. The blond man looked up casually from his newspaper, and Maxim quickly averted his eyes.

He pushed open the swinging door and walked into a subdued hubbub of gay voices and light-hearted laughter. Toward the dimly lighted rear, a garishly illuminated, glass-fronted apparatus was beating out the wildly complicated rhythm of the latest Brazilian craze. He walked self-consciously past a long row of unheeding backs, and gratefully eased himself into an unoccupied booth.

A waiter approached his table, smiling pleasantly. "Good evening," he said in Interlingua, "what will you have to drink?" A German accent was very obvious. Maxim looked quickly at the price list on the table, painfully aware of his unfamiliarity with mixed drinks.

"Vodka," he replied, and instantly wondered if he had made a mistake. The waiter raised one eyebrow.

"Straight?"

"Yes. That's it, straight, with some water," he stammered. The waiter shrugged and departed, then returned a minute later with the vodka and water. Maxim handed him a bill and told him to keep the change. He became effusive.

"Thank you, sir," he smiled. "I do not remember seeing you here before, but you will find it very friendly. Very *gemuetlich*, very nice. You will like it here." He picked up his tray and left.

Maxim tasted his vodka tentatively, then swallowed hungrily. Warmth spread from his stomach out into his veins. For the first time he relaxed, felt almost good. *Perhaps*, he

thought, *they will release me if I perform this mission successfully.* He quickly suppressed the cold voice inside that told him he would never be free. The unaccustomed liquor numbed his doubts, and he leaned back in his seat with closed eyes, dreaming of a life where one could do as he pleased, and even a criminal was still a person. As he mused, he became aware of a rustling sound opposite him, and the table trembled slightly. His nostrils inhaled an exotic, heady perfume.

He was no longer alone.

He opened his eyes slowly, then widened them quickly at the stunning brunette who sat across the table from him. He looked her over slowly, felt himself reddened at the sight of rounded breasts almost completely uncovered. It was a long time since he had been in the presence of so beautiful a woman. The sight of her, his own youth, the perfume, the vodka, all combined to send a pleasurable tingle through his body. She smiled at him.

"Hello, dear," she whispered, leaning forward.

"Good evening," he replied, and essayed a timid smile. And then suddenly he felt as though he had stepped into an icy shower. The pleasant illusion of safe isolation collapsed like a punctured balloon. The dimness of the bar became a menacing thing. The coolness became a chill that reached his marrow. A tinkling laugh from somewhere at the bar became a sound of mockery.

He knew what was wrong—terribly wrong. "*Zdrastvuy, moy dorogoy,*" she had said.

She had greeted him in his native tongue.

He looked across at her with sick eyes. "You, too?" he mumbled.

"What do you mean?" Sharply.

"Another guard, another jailer?" He smiled feebly.

She put a hand gently on his, leaned forward as if to murmur an

endearment. "Keep your voice down," she hissed. Then the German waiter approached the table, and she was suddenly smiling and charming again. "A Venus gin mist," she said casually.

The waiter returned with her tall, frosty drink, and Maxim paid. She sipped daintily through a straw, watching him intently. Then he saw her open her glittering purse and fumble inside. He heard a faint click, the barest sound of a hum, and she was bent over the handbag, her lips moving in a whisper, briefly. Then the purse was snapped shut, and she was once more talking to him, the carefully casual, preliminary chitchat of the typical pick-up.

*Miles away, Grushenko smilingly removed a set of earphones and turned to the instrument panel. "It is time for another demonstration," he remarked to Yezhov his hand poised over the red dial.*

Maxim tossed off another vodka, recklessly, seeking numbness, trying to turn off thought. He saw that his companion had set down her glass, was looking anxiously at a jeweled wrist watch. He glanced at his own: one a.m. He stood up, swaying slightly.

"Tired," he mumbled. "Better go to bed now." He bowed with exaggerated courtesy. "If you will excuse me, Please?" But he felt suddenly weak, collapse suddenly back on his seat. A sharp pang of fear shot through the fog of alcohol that clouded his brain.

She was looking at him strangely—looking at him with that gleam of clinical interest he had seen before in others. "Now," she whispered softly, and—it—began.

There was a dull ache at the base of his skull, where he knew two seeds of horror lay. The ache radiated sharply, became a pain that cut through the fog like a rapier. A million tiny insects crawled over his

skin. His forehead broke out in cold sweat. He doubled up and leaned forward, and became agonizingly sick. He groaned and cradled his head desperately in his arms. He became dimly aware that the waiter was at the table, talking anxiously to his companion. "I think he has had a little too much," he heard her laugh briefly. "Help me get him out of here." Then he was aware of strong arms supporting him, and he was stumbling through a red mist, out of the bar and through the empty lobby. He was dimly conscious, not caring, that he was being helped up a flight of steps to the second floor. A key turned in a lock, and he was in his room, let down gently on a bed.

She turned around and pressed a bill smilingly into the ready hand of a porter. "I think I better stay with my friend until he is feeling better," she murmured. The porter smirked knowingly, pocketed the bill, and left. She turned the key in the lock, came to the bedside and stood over Maxim, observing him dispassionately.

He writhed on the bed, groaning, buried his head in the pillow, and fought desperately. Then, quite suddenly there was a lifting of enormous pressure, a rapid ebbing of the agony. He turned over on his back and relaxed in utter exhaustion, bathed in sweat. He looked up at his companion with bloodshot eyes, and the coldly beautiful face swam into focus. "Please, Anya," he whispered hoarsely, "get me a glass of water."

She started, her eyes narrowing, then went into the bathroom and returned with a tumbler of water. She supported his head as he drank greedily.

"You know my name," she murmured curiously. "How did you know? Or did they tell you back at headquarters?"

He shook his head and waved her away, falling back on the pillow in

relief. "No, they didn't tell me," he muttered briefly, then looked at her again with eyes that were suddenly clear and bright. He stared incredulously.

Slowly, deliberately, she was removing her clothing.

She saw his stare, and returned it brazenly, smiling. "Every punishment must be coupled with reward," she said in low, gentle tones, "otherwise the conditioning is not complete."

He sat up in disbelief. "If you really think that after all I have just been through—"

But then she had walked to the wall ignoring his protest, and threw the light switch. By the faint light of the hotel's neon sign, filtering through the curtained window, he saw her drop the last garment.

*Grushenko's hand reached for the green dial. He looked up at Yezhov, raising a cynical eyebrow. The dial turned, one quarter of the way.*

Maxim stared through the gloom of the bedroom as the figure approached his bed, dim reflections of red and green light glimmering softly on ivory skin, accentuating sensually rounded curves and firm breasts. The exotic scent filled his nostrils, and he became suddenly aware of a euphoria that lifted him up on waves of warmth and eager hunger, thrusting back into temporary amnesia his sufferings of a short while ago. Fingers moved swiftly at her coiffure, and lustrous black hair cascaded over ivory shoulders.

Then she was sitting on the bed beside him, the scent of her hair mingling with the heady perfume. Cool fingers caressed his burning face, ran through his damp hair. A corner of his mind reasoned that this was just another part of his conditioning, to make him still more pliable for tomorrow's mission, but it was only a tiny whisper, and he

ignored it. He stretched out hungry arms.

Below, the neon sign went out, and the room was dark and warm.

Maxim became aware of a bright, pearly light filtering through the curtained window and stabbing insistently through his lidded eyes. He opened them abruptly, with an icy shock of dismay—

*The day had arrived.*

He sat up, looking wildly around the room. He realized, with an unexpected pang, that he was alone. The memories of the night before returned with a rush, and he felt himself wishing for the companionship of Anya. Synthetic the love may have been, but she had filled an aching void, and he needed her.

A key turned in his door, and the knob rattled. He got out of bed quickly, realized he was nude, and donned a robe that had not been there the night before. The door opened.

Anya entered, carrying a small tray. She kicked the door shut behind her, crossed the room and set the tray down on a small table, pulling up two chairs.

"Come," she smiled, extending an arm. "Breakfast. I brought it from my own room. Sit down and eat. You will need strength."

He knotted the sash of his robe and walked to the table slowly, drinking in her body, now smartly clad in a daytime suit. "Good morning," he said hesitatingly, seating himself at the breakfast table. His eyes dropped before her frank, amused gaze, and he felt blood rush to his cheeks. She uncovered a hot plate of bacon and fried eggs and placed it in front of him, then poured a cup of steaming coffee. He ate slowly at first, then faster with increasing appetite. He drained the cup of coffee, luxuriously, to the last drop, leaned back and sighed.

"Good," Anya murmured. She

leaned forward and touched his hand gently, smiling into his eyes. "After—after we have finished what we must do today, there are many good times in store for us. You see," she continued confidentially, "I am high in the party ranks on Venus. I can recommend that you be allowed to remain here and work with me."

Maxim arose and walked to the window. Pulling up the shade, he stared down at the street, now busy with people who seemed to be moving for the most part in one direction—south, to the space port. Gloomily, he counted the fluttering banners of some twelve nations—banners unfurled in a ceremonial, holiday mood. At the corner, a banner stretched from one side of the street to the other: "Welcome, Pandit Gombaria."

He turned his head and looked at her dully. "Must I do this thing?" he exclaimed in sudden anguish. "Why? Why? Why must this kindly old man be shot down? What will his death accomplish for the people's state?" His voice choked on the words. "Like Gandhi in the last century, must the hand of evil reach out and strike down the saint?"

The beautiful dark eyes narrowed, and the sudden mask of coldness was a terrible thing to see. "It is not for us to question the plans of the central committee," she ground out slowly, her voice an icicle that dripped cold words. "And none of us, regardless of his services, is indispensable. What the state has given, the state can take away," she emphasized. "Don't be a fool, Maxim. Perform this errand successfully, and I can promise you that you will have a degree of freedom that few others have. And there will be no more experiments."

He looked up hopefully, and suddenly she arose from the table and stood at his side, slipping her cool hand into his. "Look at me, Maxim," she whispered, her voice soft and

warm again. Her moist eyes looked earnestly into his. "I too am tired of being a high-priced woman of convenience. Perhaps—perhaps I could persuade the party executive committee that we would be useful to them as man and wife, permanently stationed in Venusberg. It could be a good cover for our activities."

"Maxim," she murmured. He looked at her with tortured eyes, and then she had thrown her arms around his neck and pulled his lips down to hers. He clung hungrily. They stood there for a long moment, then Anya pushed him gently back and sighed. She looked at her wrist watch. "Eleven o'clock," she said regretfully. "Time that you got ready," and he felt a chill touch his spine briefly.

She turned away modestly as he dressed, renewing her makeup with the aid of a compact mirror. Maxim entered the bathroom and shaved quickly and brushed his black hair, staring at his reflection with a pang of repugnance. The face was plain and open and strong, though somewhat gaunt. He gave his hands a final drying with the thin hotel towel, reluctantly, listening to Anya humming a melody as she moved restlessly about the bedroom.

There was no use delaying. The time had come. Best get this over with quickly. He threw open the bathroom door and strode into the bedroom, thrusting doubts and compunctions from his mind. "I'm ready," he said crisply. Anya turned to him and held out a dainty white hand.

He stared, feeling sick, at the small black weapon cradled in the soft palm.

She held it up before his eyes. "You understand the working of the Mannheim needle gun?" He shook his head slowly.

"Very well, then," she continued in business-like tones. "It must be fired at comparatively close range. Due to

the small mass of the needle, it can be easily deflected from its course by a strong gust of air. But it has the advantage of silence." She turned the weapon over expertly, pointing to a small lever in the handle. "The safety catch has three positions: off, paralyzing, and lethal." She turned the lever until it clicked into place, the small arrow pointing at a red dot.

"It is now set at *lethal*," she said, and slipped it gently into his right-hand pocket. "Be careful with it," she whispered. "I wouldn't want anything to happen to you."

Maxim felt the small, two-ounce bulge in his pocket with trembling fingers. "What am I to do?" he asked dully.

Anya was abruptly cold and efficient again. "Listen carefully. You will take one of the public buses and proceed directly south to the spaceport, where you will press forward through the crowd until you are close to the entrance. There you will wait for the approach of the Pandit's ground car. It will, of course, be moving slowly, so that he can receive the plaudits of the crowd."

She sneered slightly. "They think they can persuade the Indian Federation to swing into their camp." Her face smoothed out again. "But enough of that. There will, of course, be security agents in the crowd, but they will not be expecting an attack from one of their own people, and they surely have no suspicion of our plans. After all," she smiled, "both sides agreed at a summit conference to keep the cold war off the soil of Venus."

There was a bitter taste in Maxim's mouth, and bitterness clouded his eyes as he regarded Anya, eagerly reciting his instructions. A faint flush of excitement colored her high cheekbones.

"Further," she went on, oblivious of his expression, "our own agents will be in the crowd, close to you."

She emphasized the last phrase, looking into his face significantly. "They will be there to protect you and to assist your escape. At the time that Gombaria's car passes through the gate, a diversion will be supplied in the form of an old-fashioned pistol shot from somewhere in the crowd. Attention will be drawn in that direction, at which time you will fire at the Pandit. Keep the trigger firmly pressed and fan the muzzle slightly in his direction. The full load of twenty needles will thus spread out over a small area, ensuring that at least one will find its target. Then simply drop the Mannheim to the ground and lose yourself in the milling confusion. Return here to me. You understand?"

"I understand," he whispered painfully, his mouth and throat dry with fear.

"Then you are ready," she said, looking again at her wrist watch. "Go now, quickly." She pressed him gently toward the door. Standing on tip-toes, she pressed her lips against his. He returned the kiss mechanically, without warmth, and then he was outside, descending the stairs to the lobby. She stared at the closed door reflectively, eyes narrowed, then hurried to her purse, turned on the miniaturized set inside, and reported rapidly.

Grushenko and Yezhov stood before the great screen, avidly watching the progress of a small red light. Centimeter by centimeter, it crept across the grid in a straight line, from top to bottom. Square by square, it moved inexorably.

Grushenko looked at his watch. "Precisely on schedule," he said triumphantly. "And approximately at noon, a new order in interplanetary relations will dawn."

Yezhov fidgeted nervously. "What if he should have a change of heart at the last minute?"

Grushenko sighed wearily. He tapped the red dial lightly. "My dear Yezhov, we still have the *persuader* at our disposal. Any pronounced deviation from that straight line, or any negative report from an agent, and he is chastised." He caressed the dial with long, loving fingers. "So far, our Conditioned Man has never suffered more than a half-turn of the knob. The full turn is beyond the endurance of any human being. Held in that position long enough, it will also result in the death of the subject through vagus depression of heart function."

Grushenko lit a long *papirossa*, and expelled a jet of smoke through pursed lips. "In any case," he added judiciously, "we have a quick method of liquidation at our fingertips, no matter what he does, and even though he should escape our agents." He gazed at the red dial fondly. "You see? There is absolutely no escape for him."

The red light had passed the midpoint of the screen, and was crawling like a deadly insect toward the bottom.

Maxim sat stiffly in the bus, now crawling through thickening crowds of people converging on the spaceport, the driver leaning almost continually on the horn. Maxim sat with the deadly pocket on the window side of the seat, so that no brushing hand or crowding hip should sense the weapon lying there, primed and ready to spit death, needing only the pressure of his index finger to call it to life.

The travelling companion to his left had essayed friendly conversation, but Maxim had looked out the window quickly, shrugging as if he knew neither English nor Interlingua, and the man lapsed again into silence. The bus, like the street, was crowded, and Maxim gazed furtively at the swaying faces above him, look-

ing for signs of his undercover companions that Anya had mentioned.

A pair of hard eyes in a pasty face looked at him sharply, then turned away quickly and read the advertisements with studious intensity. He felt sweat grow under his armpits and trickle slowly down his sides, staining the light shirt. He licked his lips with a dry tongue and turned again to the open window, staring unseeingly at the multicolored flags in the windows and the gay throngs on the sidewalk, hearing without comprehension the confused roar and hubbub of excited voices.

The bus stopped with a jerk that Maxim felt in his stomach. Passengers were starting to crowd toward the bus exits. The driver had stood up, and was calling out words in English and Interlingua. Maxim had awaited it in dread throughout the too-short drive, and now the announcement was like the shock of ice-cold water.

They had arrived at the spaceport.

Maxim stood up, his knees weak, and clutched the chrome stanchion with a slippery hand. He edged into the center aisle, heart pounding, then descended the three steps to the pavement on shaky legs.

The crowd carried him forward toward the steel-wire fence enclosing the spaceport. He tried once to hold back, but felt a significant dig in his right side. He glanced nervously to his right, saw the pasty-faced man staring at him through warning slits, and pressed forward on leaden legs until he stood at the edge of the crowd, held back by hastily improvised rope barriers and the strong backs of the international police force.

The throng laughed and chattered happily, enjoying the break in their heavy work schedule—time out from the exploiting of a new planet to welcome a visitor from the old. The ubiquitous visitors were there, as

they always were and always would be at happy gatherings, hawking their tiny flags and helium-filled balloons for the children, and over-colored touched-up photos and cheap clay busts of the Pandit Gombaria.

Maxim looked up despairingly at the high cloud layer, an almost blinding white curtain that only half shut out the light and heat of a sun thirty-five million miles closer than it was to Earth.

He closed his eyes and formed a wordless prayer, a blind, incoherent plea, fumbling for modes of petition that up to now had been dimly remembered curiosities in old, illuminated books in the state's *byezbozhniy* museums.

There was a muted roar overhead, and the crowd roared in antiphony. Maxim opened his eyes. Thousands of feet above, the vapors swirled and churned, then parted suddenly.

A great spherical shape of gleaming metal lowered rapidly toward the spaceport, then slowed down as its Heisenberg field turned on, and drifted, light as down on a breeze, into the padded, semi-circular berth. The landing was gentle, almost shockless, and the hushed crowd sighed with relief. A fleet of vehicles closed in on the big sphere, trailing the fluttering banners of the free world settlement and the Indian Federation.

Straining over the shoulders of the man in front of him, Maxim could see a lock open in the side of the spaceship. A few small figures stepped forward expectantly on the landing platform, stood in respectful attention. A tall, stooped, white-capped figure emerged from the portal. A lone voice broke the tense silence with a cheer, was caught up and multiplied, spreading rapidly through the crowd. Successive waves of cheering rolled over the field, rose to a throbbing roar as the stooped figure slowly climbed into the lead

vehicle. The vehicle made a wide turn and headed toward the entrance to the port.

Maxim felt the knife of dread twist in his vitals, recalling the hours of horror back in the laboratory. Beads of sweat rolled down his forehead, and his hands were clammy. He gazed wildly to right and left, past bright, unseeing faces.

To the right, a few feet behind, the pasty-faced man watched him with cold eyes.

*Unseen, a hand dipped furtively into a pocket, found a flat case, and pressed a stud. Miles away, eager ears heard the alerting signal.*

The leading vehicle was a few hundred feet from the entrance, crawling at a walking pace as it neared the shouting throngs.

*Miles away, answering fingers gave a slight twist to the red dial, held it there briefly, and returned it to zero. It repeated the procedure with the green dial.*

Maxim felt a sudden pain rack his body, and his muscles stiffened. A giant vise squeezed his skull, and a wave of nausea swept over him. Then it was gone as quickly as it had come, giving way to a wave of pleasurable warmth, a near-ecstasy. The lesson was not lost on Maxim. His hand dipped reluctantly into his right pocket, curled around the handle of the gun. Without turning around, he knew that his escort was watching him grimly for any signs of hesitation.

The vehicle was at the gate. Gombaria had raised himself cautiously, holding with one hand to the top of the driver's seat, waving with the other hand to the bright faces, almost as if in benediction. Maxim bit his lip, unaware of the warm redness as it trickled down his chin. He hefted the weapon in his pocket, began to draw it forth.

The ground dropped away dizzily beneath his feet.

The Mannheim was heavy in his hand, heavier than he remembered it to be when Anya had handed it to him, back in the hotel. He spread the pocket wide with the back of his hand and looked down quickly.

The Mannheim had been replaced with an old-fashioned pistol, loaded with powder and lead bullets.

*Of course, he thought almost impersonally. I am expendable. They planned it this way. They did not think I would notice the difference until the shots rang out and the crowd turned on me.*

It became crystal clear, and he knew without knowing how, that after he had shot the Pandit, he in turn would be shot down by Pasty-face, or somebody else. And on his body they would find the damning documents that identified him as a citizen of the West European Union.

He swayed dizzily, his hand still in his pocket. But the sticky fingers relaxed on the gun-grip. Without looking, he knew that his grim escort was seized by a sudden agitation. Precious seconds were passing, and a frantic finger pressed the stud again and again.

Maxim knew what was coming, but he turned around and elbowed his way through the straining crowd, dropping the weapon unnoticed to the earth, and shuffling feet ground it unknowing into the mud. He reached the rear of the throng and staggered out into the open. A figure followed him through the unheeding crowd, breathing laboriously, its eyes narrowed with hate. The moment had passed, unused, and Gombaria disappeared down the long street, the crowd closing in behind the entourage of official vehicles.

Maxim stumbled forward, gasping at the sudden agony that set his body on fire. He leaned weakly against a warehouse wall, his breath whistling through his nostrils, his clothes soaked through.

A nearby woman, falling in with the mob as it followed the procession, noticed him. "You sick, mister?" she asked solicitously.

He shook his head dumbly and staggered blindly into the narrow alley between two long warehouses. The woman shrugged her shoulders and went on her way.

Grushenko stood rigidly in front of the screen, his elegant features livid and twisted with rage, and Yezhov shrank back before the shattering of that vast calm he had come to expect. Grushenko screamed a string of hysterical curses and obscenities at the wobbling red light on the glass grid. He reached down with shaking fingers and turned the red dial all the way to the right, viciously. "Die," he shouted, shaking his fist. "Die, you fool! Die in agony!"

The red light came to a stop near the bottom of the screen, a bare centimeter from the spot where it had stood motionless for the last fifteen minutes. It flickered, went out.

Grushenko, with an immense effort of will, once again put on his mask of composure. With a barely noticeable tremor, he put a cigarette to his lips and lit it, regarding the stunned Yezhov, who could not find words.

Grushenko smiled mirthlessly—a tight, thin-lipped smile. "Of course," he remarked quietly. "There will be an investigation into this failure. You will have much explaining to do."

Yezhov turned completely white. "I—I don't understand, comrade commissar," he stammered weakly. "How am I at fault?"

Grushenko flicked ash, stabbed his cigarette toward the other man. "My dear comrade," he drawled cynically, "inasmuch as we are alone here, I will do you a favor. I will tell you something, and in return you will eulypate me. It is this: the secret of survival is that for every failure there must be a scapegoat. One is



never in error—it is always a subordinate, or some one temporarily in disfavor. You follow?"

"I—I am not sure what you mean," Yezhov stuttered.

Grushenko rubbed his forehead wearily. "You did not take active part in the operation. I did not actually finish it. It was left to a minor member of the staff to close the opening and suture the scalp." He looked at Yezhov through lowered lids. "Are you sure of the loyalty of this man? Can we be sure that he is not a wrecker—somebody working for the other side?"

Yezhov's eyes widened in comprehension. Without a word, he turned and left the room abruptly, panic driving him to find his scapegoat. Grushenko followed his hurrying form with cynical eyes, then slowly sank into a chair, staring at the dark screen with an expression of utter disbelief.

Maxim staggered down the narrow alley between the looming warehouses, baking under the pitiless sky-shine, but he was not aware of the external heat. He was consumed by ravening internal fires. His brain burned with a white heat. The marrow of his bones turned to molten metal. His eyes stared blindly into a writhing fire-mist as his hands felt their way gropingly along the wall of a warehouse; the fine grain of the wood rasped his fingertips like files. The giant vise crushed his skull. He fell to his knees, retching vainly. The agony, already unendurable, rose to a new pitch, and he sank his teeth into his forearm to muffle the scream.

Faces floated through the formless fog of pain: the broad face of Yezhov, the chiseled features of Grushenko, the pasty face with the polished stones for eyes, and Anya—Anya smiling while her lips dripped death.

The fog darkened. His heart tripped weakly, and his breath came now in shallow gasps. He sank com-

pletely to the wet ground, lying prone in the extremity of his agony.

Then thought gave way to an animal craving for escape, for survival. He struck out with the force of the primal will, and the mist lifted a little, the pain retreated. He raised himself to his elbows, the breath whistling with every cell, and the monstrous fist loosened its grip still more. He rolled over on his back, then pushed himself to a sitting position, his back to the wall.

Quite suddenly, it was all over.

He felt, somewhere in his brain, a *reaching*. There was a vague feeling of neural switches closed, and of others opened. Calmly now, hardly knowing what he was doing, he willed his body to wall of the capsules and filaments embedded in his brain, ordered the contacting nerves to disconnect.

They were disconnected.

Maxim opened his eyes slowly as brightness greater than the high noon of Venus around him. He thought with a clarity and precision that he had dreamed of in his mathematical studies, so long ago. With a hand grown suddenly steady, he pushed the sweat-soaked hair back from his forehead.

Without looking, he was aware of another presence at the entrance to the alley, and he knew with absolute certainty who it was. He turned his head slowly. Pasty-face crept silently toward him on the balls of his feet, a Mannheim gun almost swallowed up in one huge hand. Maxim heard a string of curses. Then the mouth opened and the thick lips repeated the words.

Maxim realized with a shock that he had heard the words before they were spoken.

The gross figure stood over him, the polished-stone eyes glinting with hate. "*Traitor, traitor,*" the words came hissing in a linked pair, the silent epithet followed by the audible

one, in a fraction of a second.

Maxim stared desperately into the tiny muzzle of the weapon. The finger tightened. He looked up into the merciless eyes and pushed silently, desperately.

The menacing form relaxed suddenly. The finger slackened. The glaring eyes grew blank. Maxim raised himself cautiously from the ground to a standing position. He reached for the gun and took it from unresisting fingers. He shoved then, and the gross bulk staggered back against the opposite wall and slid down awkwardly on to its haunches. Maxim tossed the Mannheim contemptuously to the ground. Standing there a moment in silence, he meditated while his smoothly-functioning brain provided him with the answers he sought. He turned sharply on his heel, pumping strength into his shaky legs. At the entrance to the alley he was striding firmly, shoulders thrown back and head high.

In the alley, his former pursuer sat laxly with his back to the wall, staring blankly into space. A trickle of saliva dripped slowly from his chin.

In the hotel, Anya, white-faced, was throwing her things into a suitcase with trembling haste. Minutes before, she had seen the triumphal arrival of Gombaria as the procession turned off her street and headed for the civic center. The plot had failed. It was time to disappear, to vanish into anonymity. There were no new orders, and her desperate calls into the portable transmitter had remained unanswered. She wondered, with a vague pang of regret, what had happened to Maxim.

The doorknob rattled slightly, and she whirled around. "Maxim!" she gasped through bloodless lips. He entered and closed the door quietly behind him, and faced her with a sad smile.

Her racing thoughts lay open to him.

"No, Anya, I am not dead," he said softly. Her eyes were dark pools in a chalky face.

"But how? *How?*" she whispered. "I don't understand—"

"No, you wouldn't," he smiled. "But Yezhov might."

"Yezhov—a traitor?"

"Oh no," Maxim laughed briefly.

"Not a traitor. It's just that his theory worked too well, though in other hands. They pushed too long and too hard."

His smile faded and the words cracked out like a whiplash before she had completed the movement. "No, Anya, not the gun, and not the transmitter." Her hand froze over her handbag, and she stood paralyzed.

"I don't want them to know I am alive—yet," he added.

He crossed the room and took her face gently in his hands, looking down into the glazed eyes. "Anya, poor Anya," he whispered softly, and messaged her temples with his fingertips. "Forget, Anya, forget. You have never seen me or heard of me. You do not know whether I am alive or dead. You understand?"

She nodded slowly, as if in a dream, and Maxim knew that she did not remember. He walked to the door, opened it, and looked back at her for a moment, then closed the door. She sank slowly to a chair and rocked back and forth, weeping softly for a great but unaccountable loss.

Maxim stood in the hallway for a minute, sensing her mindless grief and listening to her sobs. He realized he should have felt nostalgia or regret, but could not. The memories of joy and sadness, of pain and delight, lay scattered in his memory like a child's broken toys, to be swept up and laid aside. He shrugged briefly and stalked down the stairs, through the lobby, and out of the hotel, into the bright Venusian day.

There was work to be done.

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